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Great French sermons from Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon

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GREAT FRENCH SERMONS

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Johannes B. McCluskey, s.j.,

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GREAT FRENCH SERMONS

FROM BOSSUET, BOURDALOUE, AND MASSILLON

EDITED BY

REV. D. O'MAHONY, B.D., B.C.L.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE

RIGHT REV. DOM FERNAND CABROL, O.S.B.

ABBOT OF FARNBOROUGH

"Christianity would not have enemies if it were not an enemy to their vices."—MASSILLON.

"The doctrine of the Gospels is the only one that touches the heart. A single word of the Gospel has more power over our souls than all the vehemence and all the inventions of profane eloquence."—BOSSUET

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PREFACE

THESE translations of sermons of the famous French preachers of the seventeenth century appeared during the past two years in the *Southampton Catholic Magazine*. It is thought that their merit warrants their being offered to a wider public. The sermon on Mary Magdalen and those on Impurity and on the Thought of Death are adapted from old translations now out of print : all the others were translated specially for the Southampton Magazine.

The great length of the sermons in the original French has, in most cases, necessitated some condensation in the English version. We have omitted the ingenious compliments addressed to the royal personages before whom some of the sermons were delivered. The lengthy exordiums of some of Bossuet's sermons are curtailed. Two of the sermons from Massillon are considerably abridged ; and of Bourdaloue's sermon on Death only a fragment is reproduced.

The special excellence of Bossuet's and Bourdaloue's discourses on the Passion has induced us to give several of their many sermons for Good Friday. Three of Bossuet's sermons on Our Lady are included. These are calculated to render intelligible what to many non-Catholics seems to be extravagance in the language of Catholic popular devotions to Mary ; even the French infidel, Ernest Renan, was amongst those who have paid tribute to the beauty, the vigour, and the

originality of Bossuet's sermons on the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin. In teaching that Mary died of love, Bossuet adopted the view that prevails since the Middle Ages.

The reader that has to be content with a translation for his acquaintance with the sermons of the Great French preachers will, we venture to hope, regard it as a merit that chiefly fidelity to the original is aimed at in the translations that make up this volume.

D. O'M.

St. Edmund's, Southampton.

Bossuet (1627–1704).

"Bossuet had a voice which spoke in the name of God and as the medium of Divine persuasion to the soul, and with a force and authority of language unequalled upon earth."—Lamartine.

"Bossuet is the most powerful, the most truly eloquent speaker and writer that our language has ever known."—Sainte-Beuve.

"Universal justice is rendered to the energy and precision of Bossuet's language; we admire in him the historian and the controversialist; and homage is paid to the orator, who was more abundant than Cicero and more vigorous than Demosthenes."—Ferdinand Brunetière.

"Bossuet is one of the greatest thinkers, one of the greatest men of affairs, and the greatest orator France has produced."—Emile Faguet.

"Duly to estimate Bossuet it is needful always to see, behind the genius of the man, the soul of the priest which excites and contains that genius."—M. Alfred Rébelliau.

"Bossuet is one of the very few preachers whose sermons are frequently reprinted and are read by those who seek pleasure as well as by those who seek edification. And, if we in England have no name to place by Bossuet's, the same thing is ever increasingly true of his own country. His greatness is more and more seen to be far more than his rivals', of that order of bronze or marble which resists, conquers, and survives the centuries."—*The Times Literary Supplement.*

"Not only is Bossuet the greatest orator that ever occupied the pulpit in France, but he is also, perhaps, the writer who has had the most delicate appreciation of the French language."—M. René Doumic, in the *Catholic Encyclopædia.*

Bourdaloue (1632–1704).

"Bourdaloue seems actually to take away my breath when I listen to him, with such almost painful concentration of every sense does one hang upon his words. So marvellous is the power, the truth, the enthralling interest of his discourses, that I am spell-bound while he speaks, and really only draw my breath freely again when it pleases the great preacher to bring his sermon to an end." Mme. de Sévigné.

"Father Bourdaloue is the greatest orator of whom the pulpit has to boast. His sermons have long been my constant and greatest delight."—Boileau.

"Bourdaloue seeks rather to convince than to persuade, and the idea of pleasing his hearers never for a moment enters his mind. He was the first model of good preachers in Europe."—Voltaire.

"The best sermons I ever read were preached by a Jesuit, Louis Bourdaloue."—Bishop W. Warburton.

" Bourdaloue displays a fertility of resources, an exuberance of topics, whether for observation or ornament, not equalled by almost any other orator, sacred or profane."—Lord Brougham.

" To Bourdaloue more truly than to any other is applicable the old definition of an orator, which he so often repeated to his pupils of rhetoric : *vir bonus dicendi peritus*."—A. Feugère.

" In the abstract analysis of the vices, the passions, the manifold infirmities of our nature, Bourdaloue is matchless, more penetrating and more original than La Bruyère."—M. Gustave Lanson.

" The late Canon H. P. Liddon had studied the great school of French oratory, admiring especially Bourdaloue, and of later preachers the influence of Lacordaire is distinctly discernible. To their example he owed the completeness with which he arranged the framework of his sermons as well as much of the manner and method of his appeals."—Canon H. Scott-Holland in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

Massillon (1663–1742).

" I have heard many great preachers, and I have been contented with them ; but whenever I hear Father Massillon, I go away discontented with myself."—Louis XIV.

" Massillon has usually, and justly, been considered the greatest preacher, in the strict sense of the word, of France."—Professor G. Saintsbury.

" Of Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon, the first was the most majestic ; the second the most logical and intellectually compelling ; the third the greatest searcher of hearts, the most like Chrysostom, and, taken all in all, the greatest of the three."—Rev. Professor P. A. Beecher.

" No other orator than Massillon has ever contrived to say so little while employing such a multitude of words ; or, on the other hand, to say that little in more harmonious language. No other orator has known better how to turn rhetoric to account." F. Brunetière.

" The eighteenth century placed Massillon, as a preacher, easily above Bossuet and Bourdaloue. Our age places him rather lower. He has neither the sublimity of Bossuet nor the logic of Bourdaloue. He excelled in depicting the passions, and in speaking to the heart in a language it always understood."—*The Catholic Encyclopædia*.

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INTRODUCTION

We heartily congratulate Father O'Mahony on his project of giving to English readers selections from Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon; and at the same time we express our pleasure in being asked to introduce this book to the public.

Needless to say, our congratulations are given from a Frenchman's point of view. For the more the people on this side of the Channel study our French literature, the more, we think, will they be helping to tighten the bonds of that *entente cordiale* which at the present day unites the causes of the two nations so firmly, and to make it an even more solid and enduring alliance.

We may add, and not perhaps without some ground for our assertion, that in our opinion this book will assuredly not fail to be of use to English readers, and even to English preachers.

The number of masters of the Catholic pulpit in England is very limited. This cannot be a matter of surprise to anyone, knowing as we do that from the time of Henry VIII, and for more than two centuries, the mouth of the Catholic priest in England was closed more securely than if it had been actually padlocked.

Before the schism of Henry VIII and the Reformation, that pulpit had had glorious days. But few indeed are those who will seek their inspiration in the Homilies of the Venerable Bede, or in those of Wulfstan, Dunstan, or Anselm, not to speak of Aelfric, or the *Blickling*

Homilies of the Tenth Century. As for the Protestant preachers, the Hookers, Taylors, Stillingfleets, Barrows, Butlers, Wesleys and Whitefields, I know very well that Father O'Mahony would have no desire to suggest the study of their sermons, even if they were what they are not, rivals of Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon.

As soon as liberty was restored to the pulpit, Catholics returned to the practice of the traditions of their forefathers. The conferences of Wiseman, so full of erudition and of just and methodical reasoning, some of Manning's sermons, of a sober and nervous eloquence, and most of Newman's, may be classed as masterpieces of oratory. The present generation, with the names of Hedley, of Benson, of Croke Robinson and of Maturin, to speak only of the dead, has done honour to the Christian pulpit.

But no one, I think, will deny that even though they have possessed these models, the contemporaries of Bishop Burton and of Father Bernard Vaughan may yet find in the school of our three great French preachers enjoyment and even profit.

Bossuet stands alone and unrivalled, the great master of the Christian pulpit. La Bruyère said, when speaking of him before the French Academy : " What shall I say of this personage ? Let us forestall the verdict of posterity : he is a Father of the Church." He was not in the least exaggerating. Bossuet stands on the same level as the most eloquent of those Fathers ; he is on the same level, I do not say as St. Peter Chrysologus or St. Hilary, but as St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil, St. Gregory of Nazianzen, and even St. Augustine himself.

It is not easy to define precisely the characteristics of his preaching.

The secret of his eloquence lies in the fact of his having studied the doctrines of Christianity so deeply, of his being so absolutely imbued with them, of his being so intimately conversant with them, that he was able to compare one dogma with another, grasping all their bearings, all their points of relationship to one another, seeing with so clear a vision their marvellous interdependence and their splendid unity ; and not only knowing these doctrines, but loving them, delighting in them, living in them as in his own proper element, so much so that were we to picture to ourselves a Bossuet without Christianity we should, it seems to me, be picturing a Bossuet without his genius.

This eloquence is nourished on the Bible, the Fathers, and scholastic theology, in equal proportion. He deals with Christian doctrines drawn from the purest sources, bringing to bear on them all the resources of a diction and reasoning which lose nothing when compared with the strength of a Demosthenes or the fecundity and fluency of a Cicero. He treads his way through the mazes of theological argument with so much ease, he brings with him so much movement and force, so much imperious conviction, he makes use of language so rich, so brilliant and so varied, that it has been said with the most perfect truth that " this mighty logician of Navarre reminds us occasionally of Dante and of Milton ; he is the great lyric poet of the seventeenth century " (Lanson).

Father O'Mahony, who could only give us a few of Bossuet's sermons, has been happy in his choice. The two sermons on the Passion, those on Providence, on Penance, on Death, on the Honour of the World, on the Sanctity of Mary, on her Assumption, and on the Feast of the Rosary, will suffice to make us ac-

quainted with the style of Bossuet's preaching. And if the reader, with an appetite stimulated by the contents of these pages, craves for more, we feel sure that Father O'Mahony will consider his end attained.

Bourdaloue, as a preacher, has an entirely different sort of merit. His merit, however, is sufficiently established by the fact that his contemporaries placed him on the same level with Bossuet, and I must even admit that some of them preferred him to Bossuet.

We of the present day have learned to appreciate Bossuet more justly and truly; he has no rival. At the same time, if Bourdaloue is not his equal, we can also say of him, *proximus, sed longo proximus intervallo ;* and we can understand the error of his contemporaries who have not been able to measure that interval properly.

We must begin by saying that, as regards solidity and profundity of doctrine, he is in no degree inferior to Bossuet. If he has not the power which enables the Eagle of Meaux to soar far above earth into the realms of space and to embrace in his view an immense horizon, all Bourdaloue's sermons are nevertheless based on the surest and soundest theology, on a teaching derived from the very best masters.

That which lends the principal charm to his preaching and which earned for it the fervent admiration of his contemporaries—Mme. de Sévigné among the number—was doubtless the wealth and the sureness of his psychological studies. An excellent judge in such matters could say of him : " He is more penetrating and more original than La Bruyère " (Lanson). His portraits are admirable in their justness and their profundity ; his analyses of the origin, development, and consequences of the vices and passions of men stand out in the boldest relief, and are delineated with

a wonderful exactness. We need not be surprised that an age such as that in which he lived, so passionately devoted as it was to moral delineations and character-drawing, should have been carried away by the sermons of this great physician of souls.

What the age of Lenôtre also loved in Bourdaloue was, no doubt, his mental symmetry, if I may use the expression ; a habit of mind which we in the present day are apt to regard almost as a defect, and certainly as an excess rather than as anything to admire. In perfect ordering and arranging, in exact distribution of parts, in harmonious concords of developments, he was a past-master. To listen to his sermons was like wandering through the gardens of Versailles. Therein were to be found long avenues, straight and regular, symmetrical flower-beds, alleys drawn by line and rule, and everywhere a picture of that perfect order so dear to the eyes of Louis XIV's subjects. Bossuet is much more free, much more spontaneous in his style ; his eloquence is never, so to speak, framed and glazed ; he does indeed observe the great rules of unity and oratorical proportion, he observes them but he dominates them.

The fact is that Bourdaloue had been for many years of his life a professor, and no doubt an excellent one ; and the bent of the professor always remained in him. His teaching was didactic and methodical as that of a course of lectures. Every one of his sermons is a lesson, with its divisions, and subdivisions, its proposition, its landmarks, its résumés. And yet this eloquence, wholly intellectual, wholly logical as it is, is not cold, so absolutely sincere is it, so full of conviction, so burning with zeal for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of souls.

It might seem that these two masters of pulpit eloquence had left no room to be filled up by a third on that platform of oratorical fame. Yet in Massillon such a third presented himself and found his own place. It is true that he never rises to quite the same altitude as either of the other two, but still his position is a very honourable one. He forms with them a triumvirate in which the power and the glory are certainly not equally shared, but in which nevertheless they are not wholly absorbed and swallowed up by one of the triumvirs, as has often been the case in other triumvirates.

We must at once own that in Massillon the groundwork is less firm and less rich than in Bossuet and Bourdaloue. I mean that his theological doctrine—although generally reliable, apart perhaps from some exaggerations—is not deep, and does not present itself in new and striking aspects. It is the *doctrina communis* without strikingly marked character.

What makes him most especially interesting to a French reader is his language. It is rich, polished, chaste and harmonious, marked by an unfailing smoothness and elegance. We know that Voltaire made *Le Petit Carême* his bedside book.

He approaches Bourdaloue very closely in symmetry of development, as well as in his taste for psychology and for the delineation of the vices and passions of humanity. The fact that he was deeply imbued with the spirit of Seneca and of Cicero accounts for some extracts from his sermons being included among selections from the works of the moralists.[1]

I must say that Massillon has met with harsh treat-

[1] In particular see R. Thamin, *Extraits des Moralistes* (Paris, 1909).

ment at the hands of the critics of French literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He has been represented as a mere rhetorician, a very skilful one (it is true) and in possession of all a rhetorician's powers, but in fact a preacher of the decadence, and rather a professor of lay morality than a master of the Christian pulpit.

This judgment is exaggerated and superficial. Had his sermons *en masse* been better studied by those critics, they would have seen that his teaching, if lacking the sublimity of Bossuet's and the solidity of Bourdaloue's, is yet substantial; that the tone of his preaching is full of unction; that he denounces the vices and abuses of his age, especially among the great, with a courage and freedom truly Christian; that he instructed even while he charmed his contemporaries; finally, that in some of his sermons he produced effects and obtained results which all the art of the most accomplished rhetorician would fail to explain. Bourdaloue, then at the close of his career, on seeing the success of Massillon's first sermon, said, in the words of St. John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease." There was doubtless some humility in this pronouncement, but there was also a certain amount of truth. The eloquence of the French pulpit did not die out when Bossuet and Bourdaloue retired from it.

Father O'Mahony has done well in giving to his readers selections from some of the best of Massillon's sermons, selections which will enable them to appreciate the style and method of the eloquent Oratorian.[1]

[1] We are pleased to see that quite recently, in *L'Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française*, M. Charles Dejob has done justice to Massillon.

I will not quarrel with Father O'Mahony for not having included Fénelon's sermons in his book. Bossuet's rival still holds his own as a great preacher of that period; but unfortunately we have only a few special occasional sermons of his, and these, excellent though they are, do not give full scope to his genius. The best which he has left in connection with preaching is his *Dialogues on Pulpit Eloquence*, in which he has given utterance to so many excellent precepts concerning that important gift and its right use.

From what I have said in these pages it will be very evident that my task of introducing and presenting to the public a book which I can truly say contains nothing but masterpieces of pulpit oratory, can only be a most easy and pleasant one. It would really have sufficed to say, *Sume, lege.* We have perhaps developed this formula too lengthily, but it expresses perfectly in itself the thoughts of this introduction and the desire both of him who signs it and doubtless also of the able editor of these translations.

FERNAND CABROL.

The Abbey, Farnborough,
October 20th, 1916.

GREAT FRENCH SERMONS

I

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

By Bourdaloue

"The Jews require signs, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. i. 22–24).

If there is any one subject which is calculated to bring shame and sorrow to the heart of the preacher, as he finds himself compelled by the binding rules of his sacred ministry to make it his theme, surely it is the all-engrossing, awful subject of the Saviour's Crucifixion! For he must publish to the world at large the amazing humiliations of a God, the outrages which He endured, the weakness which well-nigh overpowered Him, His weariness, His Passion, His Death. And yet, says St. Paul, in spite of all the ignominy of the Cross, I am not ashamed of the Gospel of my Saviour; for that Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who are illuminated by the light of faith (Rom. i. 16). More than this, St. Paul glories in the story of the Cross; *God forbid,* he tells the Galatians, *that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Gal. vi. 14). Yes, there is in the

whole course of the Gospel narrative nothing grander, more marvellous, or better calculated to satisfy the minds of reasonable and sensible men, than this profound and adorable mystery. For that is the literal meaning of the truly divine passage I have chosen for my text: *The Jews require signs and the Gentiles seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ Crucified, the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

The unbelieving Jews demand miracles. The vain and self-sufficient Greeks pique themselves on their search for wisdom. Both the one and the other obstinately refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, unless the condition on which each insists be granted. But I, says the Apostle, to confound at once the incredulity of the Jew and the pride of the Greek, I content myself with preaching to them Christ Crucified. Why? Because therein lies the supreme miracle of the power of God and at the same time the masterpiece of His Divine wisdom. Miracle of the power of God, which of itself and standing alone should take the place of every other miracle demanded and expected by the Jews: *Christ Crucified, the power of God!* Masterpiece of God's wisdom, which alone is more than sufficient to bring the Gentiles under the yoke of the faith and to make them renounce all their worldly wisdom: *Christ Crucified, the wisdom of God!*

It is my purpose, in this discourse, to prove to you that the great mystery of our Saviour's Death upon the Cross is not to be regarded only as the mystery of His humility and weakness, but as the mystery in which He displayed in its fullest all His Divine power. In the second place, I am going to show you that the mystery which the world has hitherto regarded only as foolishness, is in truth the mystery in which God

manifested His wisdom most openly. Give me, O my God, the power to do this ; and at the same time give to those who listen to me that docility with which Thy word should be received, that they may not only be persuaded but converted and sanctified.

That a God, being God, should act as Master and Sovereign, that He should have created heaven and earth by a word, that He should work marvels throughout the universe and that nothing should be able to resist His power, is a thing so natural for Him that it is scarcely for us a subject of astonishment. But that a God should suffer; that a God should die in agony; that a God, as Scripture says, should taste death, He Who alone possesses immortality ; this is what neither angels nor men will ever be able to comprehend. I may then well exclaim with the Prophet : *Be astonished, O ye heavens* (Jer. ii.), for this is what surpasses all that we can imagine, all that our mental vision can grasp, this demands all the submission and all the obedience of our faith. It is in this great mystery that our Faith has triumphed over the world : *This the victory which overcometh the world, our faith* (1 John v. 4). Yes, it is true that Jesus Christ suffered and died. But yet, in speaking to you of those sufferings and of that death, I do not hesitate to advance a proposition which you would treat as a paradox if the words of my text had not disposed you to listen to it with respect. I assert that Jesus Christ suffered and died as God ; that is to say, in such a manner as could belong only to a God, in a manner so suitable, so becoming to God that St. Paul, giving no other reason, believed himself to be justified in declaring to both Jews and Gentiles : This Crucified One Whom we

preach to you, this man Whose death scandalizes you, this Christ Who on Calvary appears to you to be crushed by the hand of God and reduced to the last extremity of weakness, this suffering, dying Saviour is in truth the very power of God ; what you despise in Him is the cause of our veneration for Him ; He is our God, and we want no other sign, no other proof of this than His Cross. That is the epitome of St. Paul's theology, which perhaps you have never yet thoroughly comprehended and which I am going to unfold to you.

I say that Jesus Christ died in a manner which could only belong to One Who was perfect God as well as perfect Man. A very simple statement of things as they were will convince you of this. A Man Who dies after having Himself predicted clearly and expressly all the circumstances of His death ; a Man Who dies in the very act of working miracles, and the greatest miracles, proving that there is nothing but what is supernatural and Divine in His death ; a Man Whose death carefully considered is itself the greatest of all miracles, since, far from dying from weakness like other men, He dies, on the contrary, by an effort of His almighty power ; and, what transcends all else, a Man Who by the infamy of His death attains to the highest pinnacle of glory, and Who, expiring upon the Cross, triumphs by means of that very Cross over the prince of this world, conquers by that Cross the pride of the world, raises His Cross upon the ruins of the idolatry and the infidelity of the world—is not this a Man Who dies as a God, or rather (if you will) as the God-Man ? And those are the grounds of the Apostle's assertion that this Man Who died upon the Cross was not the minister of the power of God, but the very power of God Incarnate : *Christ Crucified, the power of God.*

Truly none but God could penetrate so far into the future as to have it wholly in His power and to be able to say with absolute authority : " That will be," when the thing in question may depend upon the concurrence of an infinity of free causes. None but a God could know distinctly and of Himself the innermost recesses of all hearts, their most intimate secrets, their most hidden intentions, so as to be more thoroughly acquainted with what is or will be in the mind and will of man than is man himself. Now this is what Jesus Christ did with regard to His Passion and Death. Listening to Him as He speaks of His Passion long before the actual time of that Passion and before the Jews had as yet even formed any design against Him, you would say that He was speaking of an event that had already taken place, so exact is He in every detail, every circumstance of its history. Again, looking upon Him on the day of His Crucifixion and seeing Him enduring all those manifold and unspeakable agonies, one would be inclined to believe that His tortures were rather fulfilling His own predictions than executing judgment upon His sacred person. Then again, in order to prepare His apostles for that sorrowful mystery He says to them : We go to Jerusalem, and all that has been said of the Son of Man will be accomplished ; this Son of Man Whom you see and Who speaks to you shall be delivered up to the Gentiles, He shall be outraged, insulted, scourged, crucified ; He will die loaded with ignominy, He will rise again the third day. Already for many centuries the Prophets, who under the Old Law were the precursors of the Messiah, had foretold in detail all the circumstances of the Passion ; God had shown them that the Death of the Messiah although ignominious would in the fulness of time be

the sovereign remedy for sin, the most excellent means of salvation and redemption of the world. This He revealed to them in order that prophecy—that invincible testimony to Divinity—might render such an ignominious Death worthy of veneration and adoration, and that all who would contemplate it from this point of view, far from being scandalized, might be persuaded that there was nothing in the Passion of the Saviour that was not above and beyond humanity. This design of Almighty God became still more evident in the immediate prediction which Jesus Christ Himself made to His disciples. Speaking to them of His approaching Death, He said: *I am that Man of Sorrows of Whom Isaias prophesied; I am about to fulfil all that has been written concerning Me. The time is now at hand for the consummation of all things, and you are to be the spectators and witnesses of these things. But My desire is that you should be warned of all that is coming, so that when it comes your hearts may not be troubled by it.* And so it was. All that the adorable Saviour had pointed out to them in the books of Moses and the Prophets as concerning Himself was soon fulfilled, even to the very letter, in His bitter Passion and agonizing Death. It was in consequence and in virtue of those Divine prophecies, of which He in His own Person was the subject, that the Jews, instead of judging Him according to their own law as He was a Jew, delivered Him up to Pilate who was a Gentile; that the soldiers, in contravention of all forms of justice, adding insult and brutality to the simple execution of His sentence of condemnation, buffeted and spat upon the Divine face. This was why the very minutest details of the tragedy, the price for which He was to be sold, the use that was afterwards to be

made of that money, the dividing of His garments, the casting lots for His seamless robe, the gall which they offered to Him, all were as it seems but the carrying out by His enemies of a plan already marked out for them, as though He had only suffered this in order to fulfil the prophecies delivered so many ages before He appeared in the world: *That the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled* (Matt. xxvi. 56). Again, with regard to those secrets of the heart of which Jesus Christ in His Passion showed Himself to be so absolutely the master. He foretold to His Apostles that one of them would betray Him; and at that very moment Judas had conceived in his heart the thought of treachery, and did betray Him. He predicted to Peter that he would deny Him; and St. Peter did deny Him. He predicted to him that in spite of his fall his faith would never fail him; and his faith never did fail him. Magdalene was told by Him that her loving act of pouring precious perfumes upon His sacred head should be proclaimed and lauded throughout the whole world; and even down to the present day this has been, and still is, done. Weeping over Jerusalem, He foretold the utter and complete destruction of that beloved city; and Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans, sacked, razed to the ground, so that not one stone was left upon another. Such knowledge of future events and of the most impenetrable secrets was surely, nay indisputably, the knowledge of a God. And is it not certain that a Man dying in this manner, revealing and manifesting what could only be known to God, had indeed all the power, all the strength of God? *Christ Crucified, the power of God.*

But more than this. He dies, this God-Man, working miracles. And what miracles! Dying though He is,

He makes the earth quake, He opens the graves, He raises the dead, He rends the veil of the Temple, He darkens the sun : marvels at once tremendous and hitherto unheard of, so overwhelming to the soldiers that they left that hill of Calvary converted, and converted (as St. Augustine says) by the very Blood that they themselves had shed. Nor am I telling you anything that St. Matthew himself has not stated in the most express terms : *They, having seen the earthquake and the things that were done, were sore afraid, saying : Indeed this was the Son of God* (Matt. xxvii. 54).

But someone may tell me that the Pharisees, notwithstanding all these miracles, persisted in their unbelief. True ; but without trying in this matter to penetrate the unfathomable mystery of God's judgments, which are always just and holy although terrible and greatly to be feared, you know something of the bitter envy the Pharisees bore to Jesus Christ, and you know what such a passion can do in the way of blinding the mind and hardening the heart. However it may be, says St. Chrysostom, that was the beginning of the reprobation of the Pharisees, and the great mystery of divine predestination and reprobation is made manifest in the fact that the same miracles which converted the soldiers and a great multitude of the people, only served to render the Pharisees more intractable and more obstinate. Yet it is this very diversity which forces us to recognize in the dying Saviour that almighty power of which we are speaking ; for, as St. Chrysostom argues, to die saving some and rejecting others, enlightening the blind who were living in the darkness of unbelief, and blinding the more enlightened who were abusing the light they possessed, converting some in His mercy and allowing others to

perish in His justice ; was not this to display, even in His Death, the most glorious and essential attributes of God ?

There was only one miracle which Jesus Christ in His Passion would not work : that was, to save Himself, as His enemies proposed to Him. *If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him* (Matt. xxvii). This miracle would have destroyed all the others and put a stop to the great work which He had undertaken and in which all His other miracles culminated, the work of the Redemption of men which was to be consummated upon the Cross. Moreover, His enemies, prejudiced and biased by their animosity against Him, would have deferred as little to this miracle as to that of the raising of Lazarus. But, leaving the Pharisees, let me ask you whether Jesus Christ at this juncture, able as He indisputably was to save Himself, yet refusing to do so, did not do something infinitely greater, infinitely more beyond the power of mere man than He would have done had He consented to come down from the Cross. Think for a moment, as perhaps you have never sufficiently thought before, on the wonders of His Passion ; think of the gentle submission with which He permitted the soldiers to lay hold upon His sacred person, after having struck them to the earth by the very majesty of His presence and the simple words, *I am He ;* of the reproof He gave to St. Peter, blaming him for having drawn his sword against the servant of the high-priest when He had only to ask His Father and that Father would send to His defence legions of angels, and, to show that He did not speak idly, actually healing miraculously the servant whom Peter had wounded ; think of that marvellous and

persistent silence which He maintained before His judges, especially before Pilate, who, convinced of His innocence, only questioned Him that he might find an opportunity for releasing Him ; think of His refusal to satisfy the curiosity of Herod, whose protection He could so easily have gained ; think of His tranquil serenity in the midst of the most outrageous insults ; of His determination to bear all without appealing for justice, without asking sympathy from anyone, without uttering the slightest murmur ; think of that heroic love which made Him in dying find excuses for His persecutors ; think of all those miracles of patience in One Who was blameless in life, wise and holy beyond all others, and tell me if such miracles did not far surpass any that He would have worked by extricating Himself from the hands of His executioners and coming down from the Cross. *Christ Crucified, the power of God.*

He died, then, only because He willed to die (Isa. liii. 7), and even in the manner He willed to die. And this, says St. Augustine, is what the God-Man alone could do ; this is what shows forth, even in death, the sovereign independence of God. It is hereon I base another proposition, namely this, that the Death of Jesus Christ, if we consider it closely, was not only a miracle, but the most singular of all miracles.[1] And why ? Because, instead of dying as other men die out of weakness, out of violence, out of necessity, He died

[1] " Christ's death, as all His sufferings, is both *voluntary* and *involuntary : voluntary*, because He only dies when He Himself accepts death ; *involuntary* and *violent*, because it is most painful to His sensitive nature and because the manner of His death and all the malice that brings it about is most abhorrent to Him. So, too, in like manner, His death is both *natural* and *miraculous : natural*, because He submits to the laws of human nature and the natural causes of death are having their full effect on Him ; *miraculous*, because it is only through a miraculous and stupendous effort of

by the effort of His own absolute power; so that, as Son of God and as God Himself, He never exerted that absolute power more supremely than at the moment in which He consented that His most blessed soul should be separated from His body; and for this theologians give two reasons. In the first place, they say, Jesus Christ being exempt from all sin and absolutely impeccable, He could not but be naturally immortal; whence it follows that His body and His soul, which were united hypostatically with the Divinity, could not be separated from each other but by a miracle. It was, then, of necessity that Jesus Christ, in order to effect this separation, should, so to speak, do violence to all the laws of ordinary providence, and that He should employ all the power which God had given Him for the destruction of that beautiful life which, although human, was at the same time the life of a God. Secondly, because Jesus Christ, in virtue of His Priesthood, was pre-eminently the High Priest of the New Law, none but He could or should offer to God the Sacrifice for the redemption of the world, and immolate the Victim destined for that Sacrifice. Now, this Victim was His own body. None then but He was to offer this Sacrifice, none but He had the power necessary for such an act. The executioners who crucified Him were indeed the ministers of the justice of God, but they were not the priests who were to sacrifice this Victim to God. For this a High Priest was

Divine power that His Soul and Body, hypostatically united with the Divinity, and possessing the Beatific Vision, can suffer or be subject to the action of death.

"By His own will, and by commanding death to come, He immolates Himself. He is slain by men; but as High Priest He immolates Himself. He commands, and death is completed; He wills, and natural causes produce their effect. Out of no necessity but by His own choice, He sends forth His soul."—Rev. P. Gallwey, S.J., *The Watches of the Passion* (London: Art and Book Co.).

needed who should be holy, innocent, spotless, separated from sinners and endowed with special characteristics peculiar to Himself (Heb. vii. 26–28). But to Jesus Christ alone could those characteristics belong; whence it is that St. Augustine draws the conclusion that Jesus Christ Himself was both the Priest and the Victim in His Sacrifice. He Himself it was Who sacrificed Himself, He it was Who exercised upon Himself this function of Priest and Pontiff; He it was Who destroyed, at least for the space of a few days, that adorable compound of a suffering body and a glorious soul; in a word, He Himself it was Who put Himself to death (Isa. lii.). He laid down His life of Himself: *No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself* (John x. 18).[1] He died upon the cross, says St.

[1] "How was Christ *free* in laying down His life, if, as He declares, in the end of this same verse, He had a command from His Father to do so? Suarez explains thus: Christ's human will had, strictly speaking, the *power* of resisting the will of God, and of sinning, and was therefore free; consequently, His human will was free in accepting the command to die, because, strictly speaking, it had the power to resist. No doubt this power could never be reduced to act in our Divine Lord, for the Second Divine Person, in virtue of its hypostatic union with Christ's humanity, was bound to preserve His human will from sin by the operation of grace, so that Christ was always extrinsically impeccable."—Bishop MacRory, *Gospel of St. John.*

"The position of head and representative, and surety for the human race, was assumed by Christ *voluntarily*: by which word I refer not so much to His own divine decree, by which He made Himself man, as to the act of His human will subsequent to His Incarnation, by which He placed Himself at the disposal of His Father, to be the *Son of man*, i.e., the chief of mankind, to *take our infirmities and bear our diseases* (Matt. viii. 17), to obey as we had not obeyed, and to suffer what we had deserved to suffer. For we must remember that such was the dignity of Christ as Man that no command could be imposed upon Him apart from His own express human willingness to receive it. To compare great to small, the obedience that a religious man pays to his superior is voluntary, inasmuch as it was by a free election that he originally bound himself thereto. But more than this, theologians say, it rested with Christ as man, at any moment of His earthly existence even during the hours He was on the cross, by an absolute act of His human will to ask to be dis-

Augustine, but, properly and strictly speaking, He did not die by the punishment of the cross ; for it is certain, even from the testimony of the Jews, that the death of the cross, or rather that which caused the death of criminals condemned to crucifixion, was the being broken alive upon that tree of anguish.[1] Now, as the Prophets had foretold, Jesus Christ had already breathed His last sigh when they were intending to break His bones ; hence it was that Pilate was so much astonished to learn that He was already dead (Mark xv. 44). And the great cry He uttered at the moment of expiring (Mark xv. 37) is a proof that He did not die by the exhaustion of nature ; the centurion who was watching Him closely, when he heard that piercing cry, declared openly that He was indeed the Son of God (Mark xv. 39). Could more be needed to justify the words of the Apostle : *Christ Crucified, the power of God ?*

It is true that this dying Saviour experienced faintness and weariness and weakness ; but (says St. Chrysostom) the marvel is that His very weakness and exhaustion all through His Passion were but so many miracles. When the sweat poured from Him in the Garden, it was a sweat of blood and so abundant that it bedewed the ground. When, a few moments after His death, they pierced His sacred side, by another miracle blood and water poured from it. One would

charged of the burden of satisfying for us, and He would have been there and then discharged : He would have been glorified and we left unredeemed (Heb. x. 5–10 ; Phil. ii. 6–7 ; Matt. xxvi. 53)." —FATHER JOSEPH RICKABY, S.J., *The Lord my Light* (London : Burns and Oates).

[1] " Our Saviour," writes Father Joseph Rickaby, S.J., " died of the scourges as much as of the nails. Owing to the scourging, He lived so short a time upon the cross, to Pilate's surprise ; He was dying when He came to crucifixion."

imagine that He suffered and died only that He might show forth the power of God in His own person.

But let me come to the last and most essential proof : the spectacle of a Man Whom the ignominy, shame, contempt and infinite humiliation of His Death raise to such a height of glory as could be claimed only by a God ; so that at the very sound of His Name and at the sight of His Cross the most exalted and powerful of the world's dignitaries bend the knee and prostrate themselves in homage before Him. *He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto the death of the Cross. For which cause God hath exalted Him, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow* (Phil. ii. 8). This is what God revealed to St. Paul, at a time when all things seemed to be in opposition to the fulfilment of this prophecy, at a time when according to all the views of human prudence this prediction was certain to be regarded as chimerical, at a time when the name of Jesus Christ was held in detestation. Nevertheless, what the Apostle foretold has come to pass ; what was for the Christians of that time a matter of faith has ceased in a measure to be such for us, since we are witnesses of the fact. The powers of the earth do now bend the knee before the Crucified. Princes, yes, and the greatest of our Princes, now prostrate themselves on Good Friday before the Altar, to venerate the Cross and to adore Christ Crucified. Now a Man Whose Cross has passed from the shameful place of execution to the brows of Kings and Emperors ; a Man Who, without any other weapon than the virtue of that Cross, has vanquished idolatry, triumphed over superstition, conquered the universe, whereas the greatest monarchs of the world have needed so much help to enable them to achieve their smallest victories ;

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a Man Who found in what brings death to others only a means of reigning gloriously, *for the Lord reigneth from the Tree;* a Man Who had predicted to the world that from the moment in which He should be lifted up on the Cross He would draw all men to Him; was not such a Man as this more than man? was He not at once both God and Man? And how marvellous, how tremendous the power of the Cross! Think of what has been effected in the world by the secret mystic charm of that all-powerful Cross! *Christ Crucified, the power of God.*

Yet the Pharisees saw the miracles wrought by this Crucified God and were not converted. To us this seems almost incomprehensible. But, after all, is what we see in ourselves less incomprehensible? We see the miracle of the triumph of the Cross over the world, and yet our faith remains languid and wavering. Jesus Christ in His Death worked miracles; one more must be added, the miracle of our own conversion. He cleft the rocks, He opened the graves, He rent the veil of the Temple in twain. The sight of the Cross must pierce our hearts, harder perhaps than even those rocks; it must open our consciences, hitherto perhaps as firmly closed as the graves themselves; it must tear and rend our sinful flesh by the discipline of penance. For why should not this dying God convert us, since His Blood had power even to wash away the sins of the Jews who shed it; and when should He convert us, if not on this great day of Good Friday when His Precious Blood is flowing in such copious streams for our sanctification and salvation? O Lord, bless these words of mine, and suffer me to hope that among those who listen to me there may at least be some who will become penetrated with the feelings which this supreme

truth of the Sacrifice of the Cross should excite in them.

The mystery of a Crucified God appears to be foolishness to some modern philosophers, as it did to the Greeks; and yet St. Paul maintains that, as regards the chosen and the faithful, it is pre-eminently the mystery of God's wisdom: *Unto them that are called, Christ Crucified, the wisdom of God.* Now let us see which of the two has judged better, the Apostle or the man of the world: the Apostle who was instructed on the subject by the Saviour Himself; or the worldling who knows and understands nothing about it but what flesh and blood have revealed to him. Let us see whether in this mystery of the Cross, so far apparently above and beyond our reason, there is really anything to offend our reason. For God does not desire to reject the judgment of our reason, and, provided that our reason be not prejudiced nor obstinate, He does not refuse to admit it into the councils of His wisdom or to answer any of the difficulties that may be troubling it.

What, then, was the purpose of the mystery of the Crucifixion? It was twofold, and equally difficult and necessary as viewed from either aspect: to satisfy God, offended and dishonoured by the sin of man; and to reform man, corrupted and perverted by sin. For this Jesus Christ came into the world; this was the mission received by Him from the Eternal Father. Now I ask you, could He, God as He is, have adopted for the attainment of those two ends a more powerful, a more efficacious means than the Cross? and couldwe, with all our pretended reason, have imagined one in which the proportions should be so exactly preserved?

Let us go to Calvary ; and there, witnesses of all that is passing on that Hill of Crucifixion, let us ponder the mystery of our religion, that mystery of which St. Paul so greatly desired to comprehend the height and the depth. God must be satisfied for sin, and none other but a God-Man could make adequate satisfaction. What has this God-Man done ? Say rather, what has He not done in order to pay to the full the mighty sum of our debts ? He chose the only possible way of absolutely and entirely filling up the measure of that satisfaction which God expected and had a right to expect. In what did the offence against God consist ? In man's forgetting himself and affecting to be like God. And I, says the God-Man, Who am not only like to God but equal to and consubstantial with Him, I by a very different sort of self-forgetfulness will make Myself lower than all men ; I will become the outcast of men, *a worm of the earth and no man.* Man, in revolting against God, had shaken off the yoke of obedience and violated the commands of his Sovereign. And I, says the God-Man, wholly independent and self-existent though I am, I will reduce Myself to a state of the most painful, the most humiliating subjection ; I will make Myself obedient even to the death of the Cross ; not only will I obey God, but I will obey men, even the most criminal, the most vicious, My persecutors, My executioners ; not only will I obey the decrees of Heaven, always just and wise, but I will obey those of earth, even those that are unjust and cruel ; I will yield obedience to powers leagued against Me, and by this voluntary self-subjection I will abolish the crime of man rebellious to the law of his Creator. This, says St. Bernard, is why He would not come down from the Cross preferring to fulfil the commands of

His Eternal Father rather than to convert the Jews by not obeying. Man by his criminal intemperance in the matter of the forbidden fruit had permitted to his senses the enjoyment of a prohibited pleasure ; and I, says the God-Man, Who if I would might refuse Myself nothing of earthly delights, I will present Myself to My Father as a Man of Sorrows, as a Victim of Penance, as a Lamb destined for the Sacrifice. For it was in His Sacred Passion that, burning with zeal for the glory and the interests of God, He put into execution that vast design of which the Psalmist prophesied. *O My God,* He cries in the depths of His Sacred Heart, as (according to St. Paul) He cried in the moment of His entrance into the world, *sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not, but a body Thou hast fitted to Me ; the sacrifices of goats and calves have ceased to be pleasing to Thee, therefore I have said : Behold, I come, I offer Myself as a Victim.* Words holy and worthy of all veneration, and which may be taken, even to the very letter, to express what took place on Calvary, when Jesus Christ, as the Great High Priest, put an end for ever to the sacrifices of the Old Law by consummating the Sacrifice of the Law of Grace. On the Cross, which was His Altar, He offered His own Precious Blood, instead of the blood of goats and of calves ; He satisfied the Eternal Father, no longer with strange offerings, but by the offering and sacrifice of Himself. This was the work of the wisdom of God.

Yet that is not enough ; for I must also remind you that this Saviour has made us completely understand what was of itself incomprehensible, and what without Him we should never have known ; He has made known to us what God is, what sin is, and what salvation is. What is God ? A Being for Whose glory it was

necessary that a God-Man should humble and annihilate Himself even to the Cross. This is the one thought which fills my mind on this great festival of Good Friday ; all else is insufficient to bring me to the knowledge of God ; all that I discover of Him in nature, all that theology tells me of Him, all that the Scriptures teach me of Him, all that the light of glory shall reveal to me of Him, all these (I say) are, properly speaking, only shadows. It is on Calvary that faith, as in the broad light of day, shows me this God as great as He really is ; for there I behold a God-Man immolated to make known to me what He is ; and God Himself, if I may venture to say so, has no more sublime idea of the Divinity of His Essence than that of His deserving to be glorified by the Cross of a God-Man. What is sin ? An evil for the expiation of which it was necessary that a God-Man should become anathema and an object of malediction : He was *made a curse for us* (Gal. iii.). This is what the mystery of the Cross preaches to me. I was unable to conceive how sin could draw down upon us such terrible punishments ; and, setting myself up as a censor of God's decrees, I asked Him the reason of that frightful eternity of pain which His justice inflicts on the lost souls in Hell. My ignorance, however, came from not having well considered the mystery of Jesus Christ dying on the Cross ; for the death of a God, appointed as a means necessary for the destruction of sin, makes me understand more fully than I would desire what a just proportion there is between sin which is the offence against God and a miserable eternity which is the punishment of the creature. Taking the one for granted, I no longer find any difficulty in the other. I am convinced by the reasoning of Jesus Christ : *If they do these*

things in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry (Luke xxiii. 31) ; if the Son of the Eternal Father, the Son Who is innocent and spotless, is thus dealt with, what will become of the slave and the guilty ? I am no longer astonished at the severity of God's judgments or at the excess of His vengeance ; rather am I astonished at my own astonishment. What is the salvation of man ? A benefit which has cost the life of a God, and for the purchase of which a God-Man thought it not too much to give the sacrifice of Himself. That is the great lesson taught me by this Divine Master expiring on the Cross. I counted this salvation for nothing, I neglected it, I exposed it to danger, I risked the loss of it ; some trifling interest, some fictitious honour, a moment of pleasure, perhaps of the vilest pleasure, made me cast it aside. But the Crucified God speaks to me, His streaming wounds cry out to me : Draw near, draw near, and learn from My sufferings the value of thine own soul ; thou hast indeed a high esteem for thyself, but yet not high enough ; contemplate thyself in Me, then thou wilt see what thou art and what thou art worth ; it is by Me that thou oughtest to measure thyself, for I am thy price, and this salvation which thou hast again and again rejected is nothing less than what I am Myself, since I deliver Myself up in order to secure it for thee. Thus my Divine Lord speaks to me from His Cross. Now that alone would be sufficient to make me conclude with St. Paul that the Mystery of the Cross is the Mystery of Divine Wisdom : *Christ Crucified, the wisdom of God.* In this Jesus Crucified St. Paul found a perfect epitome of all that he should know and of all that it was his interest to know, namely, the eminent knowledge of God and the saving knowledge of him-

self ; he *counted all things to be but loss, for the excellent knowledge of his Lord Jesus Christ* (Philip. iii.).

But let us go deeper still into a truth so edifying, and let us develop the second motive of the mission of Jesus Christ and of His work as a Saviour. After having satisfied God, the next task was to reform man, who had not only fallen into disorder but into the deepest and most extreme abyss of disorder. This terrible condition of man, says the beloved disciple St. John, proceeded from three sources : the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life ; that is to say, from an inordinate craving for the good things of this world, from a restless eager seeking after temporal glory and honours, and from undue attachment to the pleasures of the senses. Of these three grievous maladies we had to be cured, and here are the remedies which the Son of God brought down to us from Heaven and offers to us in His Passion : the stripping Himself of all things in His life and still more in His death, to be set against our love of riches and possessions ; His unspeakable humiliation and meek subjection, in contrast to our devouring ambition and schemes of self-aggrandisement ; the austerities of His pure virgin flesh bleeding and lacerated, against our luxury and sensuality. Remedies sure and infallible, which it only depends upon us to apply to ourselves, and in which are apparent all the providence and the wisdom of the Physician Who has prepared them for us. Do not let us be taken up with other matters ! let us for once do ourselves justice, that we may henceforth for ever do justice to our God. Is it not evident that the Mystery of the Cross is absolutely in opposition to these three principles which are the cause of all the irregularities of your lives ; is it not clear that this

Mystery condemns all your injustice, your violence, your hatred of one another, your scandalous intrigues, your dissolute conduct, your rioting and lust ; and does it not follow that it is a mystery over which the wisdom of God has presided ? That which has power to moderate our desires, to regulate our passions, to confound our pride, to root out of our hearts self-love, to correct all our vices and to keep us in order, must it not be the effect of that supreme order which is the wisdom of God ? What would be the result if men, by unanimous consent, agreed to live according to the example that Jesus Christ gave them, and the lessons He taught them in His Sacred Passion, so that this Crucified God should be the universal rule whereby all men should govern their conduct ? To what a height of perfection would not the world, now so corrupt, find itself suddenly raised ? Should we see in society so much treachery, resentment, ill-will and duplicity ? Would the spirit of selfishness hold such sway there ? Would jealousy and ambition cause such dissensions, would good faith and probity be so completely excluded ? Would the rich abuse their wealth, would the so-called favourites of fortune forget God while at the same time they forget themselves in their prosperity ? No, just in proportion to the irregularity and dissoluteness of men's lives now, would be the wisdom and rectitude of their conduct and the blameless purity of their lives.

But why was it necessary that Jesus Christ, though not subject to any of our spiritual maladies, should yet in His own person have submitted to the application of these remedies ? St. Augustine gives an answer. These remedies being so bitter and repulsive as they are, could Jesus Christ do better than experience all

their unpalatableness Himself, in order to sweeten them for us and to persuade us to make use of them ? Had He not done this, could we ever prevail on ourselves to taste them ? Would anything less than the example of a God have induced us to take them ? Let us suppose that this God-Man had, for our salvation, chosen not the Cross but all the delights of life ; think in that case what advantages our self-love, the source of all our corruption, would have drawn from such a circumstance ! Should I then have anything to justify me in asking of you the mortification of the senses, the crucifixion of the flesh, self-renunciation, the humiliation of penance ? Would you even listen to me ? Would not the very idea of your God decked with all the splendour of worldly honours and pleasures be sufficient to prejudice you against my reasoning ? On the other hand, what force does not this example of a God give to my ministry and my teaching ? Was it not supreme wisdom on the part of God to furnish the ministers of Jesus Christ and the preachers of the Gospel with a means of closing your lips when they are enforcing on you the practice of the more difficult duties of your religion, and of making it impossible for you to answer them when they reproach you with your imperfect discharge of those same duties ? But why, you will ask, correct one excess by another ? the excesses of man by those of a God. But I answer, what wisdom to correct the excesses of evil by those of perfection ! the excesses of iniquity by those of sanctity ! the excess of ingratitude by an excess of love ! In order to draw man back from the extremity of vice into which he had been carried, was it not necessary to lead him towards the extreme of the opposite virtues ? Could he, swayed and tossed to and

fro by the violence of his passions, have kept the middle path between the two extremes; and, in order to extinguish in him the fires of avarice, ambition, and impurity, was it not necessary to make him love poverty, humiliation, and austerity? For, again, in order to save us in a perfect manner it was not sufficient for Jesus Christ to come down into the world to tell us that those three lusts would destroy us; it was necessary that He should come in such guise as would induce us to fight against them, to thwart them, to tear them out of our hearts. They destroyed us only in as far as they led our reason astray and poisoned our hearts, and if we had gone on esteeming and loving these lusts we should have been only half saved; and therefore it was necessary that the virtues opposed to these lusts should become to us not only endurable but loved, revered, most precious. Now, for that end, what more marvellous and perfect means could the Word of God have found than to consecrate them in His own Person, so that (as St. Augustine says) in the humility of a God the humility of man might find strength and support against all the assaults and insults of pride?

Well, is not all this enough, Christians, I do not say to convince, but one day to confound our reason? God grant that His most strict judgment may not already have begun for us, that judgment in which our reason must be at once convinced of its errors and confounded, for the dying Saviour assumed the office of Judge of the whole world; the Cross was the first tribunal on which He appeared, pronouncing against or in favour of men decrees of death or life. It is a truth of our faith that the Judgment of the world began at the very moment in which the Passion of Jesus Christ began; He Himself explained this to His

Apostles : *Now is the judgment of the world* (John xii.). When we are told that the Cross to which the Son of God was nailed will at the end of the world appear luminous and terrible before the eyes of men, this is not a mere idle threat to excite our terror ; no, that Cross is to regulate the judgment that God will pronounce upon us and upon all men. *Then shall appear the Sign of the Son of Man* (Matt. xxiv.). Ah ! how terrible a thought for one who lives for this world only ! It is the Cross of Christ Jesus which shall judge me ; that Cross which is so hostile to all my passions ; that Cross which I have only honoured in theory and continually dishonoured in practice ; that Cross of which I have never made any use, and of which I as regards myself have made void the merits. That is the Cross with which I shall be confronted : *Then shall appear the Sign of the Son of Man ;* and all that is not found to be conformable with that Cross will then be impressed with the sign and seal of reprobation. Now, what features of resemblance can I discover between that Cross and my licentiousness, between that Cross and my idle follies, between that Cross and my self-indulgent, sensual, lustful life ? Ah ! Lord, shall I then be condemned by the greatest of Thy many benefits and by the very pledge of my salvation ? And will what ought to reconcile me with Thee only serve to make me more odious and more criminal in Thy sight ? But, on the other hand—consoling thought for a faithful devout soul !—it is the Cross of Jesus which will decide our lot. In that Cross I have placed all my confidence ; that Cross has strengthened me and does still strengthen me day by day in all my griefs and troubles ; the representation of that Cross I am now, on this Good Friday, going to venerate before the altar. My Cruci-

fied God, receive my homage, accept the devotion of my heart ; and grant that Thy Cross, after having been to me in life the subject of my veneration and still more the object of my imitation, may through all eternity be for me a sign of benediction.

II

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

By Bourdaloue

"And there followed Him a great multitude of people, and of women who bewailed and lamented Him. But Jesus turning to them, said: Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke xxiii. 27–28).

Can it really be that the Passion of Jesus Christ, in whatever light faith may present it to the eye of the soul, is yet not the object which ought to occupy our minds the most exclusively, and stir in them the deepest emotion? Can it really be that our tears may be more devoutly and more profitably employed than in weeping over the death of the God-Man; and that another duty, more pressing, more imperative, suspends, so to speak, the obligation which is imposed upon us of compassionating fervently and most tenderly the sufferings of our Divine Redeemer? We should not have thought it possible; and yet it is Jesus Christ Himself Who speaks to us, and Who, as a supreme proof of His charity, generous, disinterested beyond comparison or imagination, on His way to Calvary where He is about to die for us, warns us not to weep for His death, but for something quite different: *Weep not for Me, but for yourselves.*

St. Ambrose, delivering the funeral oration of the Emperor Valentinian the Younger, in the presence of

the whole population of Milan, thought that he had discharged his duty perfectly and had satisfied all that his audience expected of him when he exhorted them to acknowledge, by the tribute of tears, all that they owed to the memory of that incomparable prince who had exposed his life and, so to speak, sacrificed himself for them. But I, whose business it is at this moment to speak to you of the death of the God and Saviour of men, find myself compelled to make use of language very different from that of St. Ambrose. Instead of borrowing his words, which would seem so suitable to my subject, I must say to you : No, do not give to this dying God tears which He does not demand of you. They are indeed precious ; keep them carefully in store till they are asked of you for an object more important than anything that you can imagine. Not only are you permitted by Jesus Christ not to weep for His death, but He even expressly forbids you to do so, if to weep for it would hinder you from weeping for another evil which touches you far more closely and which is in fact more deplorable than the death even of the Son of God. I know that all creatures were, or seemed to be, disturbed by that marvellous event ; that the sun withdrew its light, that the earth trembled, that the veil of the Temple was rent, that the rocks were cleft asunder, that the graves were opened, that the dead came to life again ; that all nature was thrilled by it. Yes, I know all this ; yet, once again, man and man only is dispensed from this solemn duty, provided always that he fulfils another, less tender apparently, but in fact more solid and more binding. Let us then leave to the stars and to the elements, or—if you desire to associate with them intelligent beings—let us leave to the blessed Angels the care of doing honour

to the death and burial of Jesus Christ, by signs of adoring grief : *These angels of peace,* says Isaiah, *weep bitterly for Him.* As for us for whom God has other designs, instead of weeping for Jesus Christ, let us weep as He wept, let us weep for what made Him weep ; so shall we sanctify our tears and render them profitable to ourselves.

Adorable Cross ! we will shed them before thee, and to them thou wilt impart that heavenly virtue, that wondrous sanctity which was infused into thy precious wood when thine arms embraced the King of Saints. To thee we turn, full of confidence, crying out with the whole Church : *O crux ! ave.*

An evil greater in the eyes of God than even the death of a God ; an evil more deserving of being wept for than all that the only Son of God endured ; an evil to which our tears are more rightfully due than to the Passion of the God-Man ! Ah ! you are too enlightened not instantly to be able to say what that evil is—sin. There was nothing in the whole world, excepting sin, which could justify the words of the Divine Saviour when He says to us, with equal truth and charity : *Weep not for Me, but for yourselves.*

Let us consider the mystery of His Sacred Passion, only that we may weep over our own miserable sins, and weep over these sins only while contemplating the mystery of His Sacred Passion. In truth, had our Divine Lord suffered independently of our sin, His Passion, however severe for Him, would have nothing in it so terrible for us ; and if our sin had no connection with the sufferings of Jesus, sin though it is, it would be less odious to us. It is by sin that we ought to measure the inestimable benefit of the Passion of the Son of God ; and the gravity of sin must be measured

by that same inestimable benefit of His Passion. Sin was the essential cause of the Passion of Jesus Christ ; sin is a continual renewal of His Passion ; sin renders His Passion useless and even hurtful to us : that is what deserves all our tears, and demands all our attention.

The spectacle of a suffering God, which faith offers to our contemplation, is, in the natural order, stupendous ; yet I venture to say that, amazing as is this marvel, it does not approach the deep unfathomable wonder of that second spectacle which the same faith reveals to us in the supernatural order, when she sets before our eyes a penitent God. Yet such—oh, unsearchable depth and height of the Eternal Wisdom ! —such is the attitude which the Saviour of the world deigned to assume, the part which He deigned to play throughout His adorable Passion. Such is the mystery we are celebrating ; and, since according to Scripture true penance consists principally in contrition (which makes us detest sin) and satisfaction (which must expiate sin), when I say a penitent God I mean a God touched with the most fervent contrition for the sin of man and satisfying for man's sin at His own expense and with all the rigour of justice—two obligations which the God-Man took upon Himself from the first moment of His Birth and which, as we shall see, He fulfilled perfectly at the time of His Passion. I propose to put before you two scenes to show you the one supreme Mediation between God and man : the scene in the Garden of Gethsemani, where you shall see a God contrite, sore distressed, feeling all the bitterness of sin ; and the scene on Calvary, where you shall see the picture of a God offering Himself a sacrifice for the reparation of sin, a dying God. And from this we shall conclude, with Pope St. Leo, that the Passion of

the Son of God was the universal penance, the public and recognized penance, the perfect and consummated penance for all the sins of men, and that it was those sins which caused it. Can you and I want anything more to force from us tears, not of vain and profitless compassion, but of holy and salutary compunction? *Weep not for Me, but for yourselves.*

I. Scarcely has Jesus Christ entered the Garden of Gethsemani, in which He is about to pray, when He is as it were enveloped in the darkness of a most profound sadness. So intense is this feeling, so keen and overpowering, that He cannot conceal it. He tells His disciples of it: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.* Terror takes hold upon Him; weariness overpowers Him; so great is His struggle with Himself that He already suffers as it were a foretaste of His agony; and so violent is this conflict, that the sweat pours from Him in drops of blood. What does all this mean, asks St. Chrysostom, in a God Who was strength itself and Whose apparent weakness could only be so many miracles of His all-powerful charity? What does He fear? at what is He troubled? why this overwhelming dejection and distress in a soul which, enjoying the clear vision of God, must be filled to overflowing with the purest raptures of beatitude? Why this internal war, this surging of passions in a soul incapable of being moved by other springs than those of sovereign reason? Ah! this is what we have to meditate upon, this is what we can never comprehend too well for our edification. For to say that the agony of the Passion lay in the dread of death, of the ignominy of the Cross, and of all the tortures and humiliations that were being prepared for the Saviour of the world, would indeed be

to form but a low idea of the Passion of Christ. No, no, continues St. Chrysostom, it was not this which troubled that great soul. The Cross which Jesus Christ had chosen as the instrument of our Redemption did not appear to Him so terrible an object; that Cross which was to be the basis of His glory had, in His eyes, no shame attached to it. The cup which His Father had given Him to drink, and which for that very reason was so precious to Him, was not that bitter cup from which He shrank with horror. That sweat of blood which poured from all the members of His Sacred Body was not forced from Him by the approach of the mysterious baptism of His Death. For though that was indeed to be a baptism of blood, yet He had Himself ardently desired it; He had said to His disciples: *I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished!* It was not, then, the prospect of death, or of its attendant agonies, which filled the soul of Jesus with such unutterable woe. There was another cause; and I have already told you what that cause was—sin.

For while the Chief Priests and the Pharisees in the house of Caiphas held counsel against Jesus and were preparing to bring their false accusations against Him, Jesus Himself, in the Garden, humbled to the very dust, prostrate on the earth before His almighty Father, considered Himself (although without prejudice to His innocence) as laden with actual sins; in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah, God laid upon Him the iniquities of the whole world (Isa. liii.). Yes, on His adorable Son Who knew no sin, the Eternal Father laid the sins of all nations, of all ages, of all states and conditions. All the sacrileges, the blasphemies, the abominable crimes which have covered the earth as

with a horrible leprosy, were heaped upon His devoted head, and the consciousness of them was an agony worse than death. This we know from His own words : *The sorrows of death surrounded me ; and the torrents of iniquity troubled me* (Ps. xvii.) ; for St. Augustine interprets the language of this Psalm as spoken of Jesus Christ Himself. Again, Jeremiah in his prophetic capacity had doubtless this before his mental vision when he said to Jesus Christ : *Great as a sea is Thy sorrow* (Lam. ii.). Ah ! dear Lord, Thy sorrow is indeed as a mighty ocean, fathomless, limitless, swollen by the sins of men which poured themselves like so many rivers into the soul of the Son of God. Yet with this difference. The rivers which flow into the sea mingle with its waters, lose themselves in its immensity ; whereas in this abyss of iniquity and sea of sorrows in which the soul of the Saviour was engulfed, each separate sin stood out apart from the others in all its heinousness and loathsome individuality ; and as the mighty torrent swelled and widened, pouring itself in its turbid blackness over the sinless, spotless Soul brimful of zeal for God and charity for man, can we wonder that the awful deluge was followed by the sweat of blood ?

That is what I call the contrition of a God ; and that was the first act of His penance. Do we thus regard sin ? does any grief which we may feel for sin work in us such results ? Let us question our consciences more closely on this subject. Is sin to us a torture as it was to Jesus ? do we dread it, as He did, more than any other evil in the whole world ? Ah ! this is the great disorder with which we have to reproach ourselves with ever-flowing tears of compunction. A God is troubled at the sight of our sin, and we are calm ; a God is

afflicted by it, and we console ourselves in the matter ; a God is humiliated by it, and we still carry our heads high ; a God sweats drops of blood, and we do not shed a single tear : that is what ought to alarm us. We sin, and, far from being sorrowful unto death, perhaps after sinning we again insult the providence and justice of our God by saying to ourselves with the wicked : *I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me* (Ecclus. v. 4) ? am I less at my ease ? does the world hold me cheaper ? have I less credit or authority ? And from such reasoning results that false peace which is so directly opposed to the agony of the Son of God ; that vain security, that presumptuous confidence which makes us sanguine, bold, recklessly defiant even in the midst of our sins, abusing the mercy and patience of our Divine Redeemer. What a hideous contrast to the self-abasement, the deep humiliation, the agony of the Incarnate Word which this haughty indifference and blind self-complacency of sinners demanded, and which was required as atonement to the Eternal Father ! Nothing could fully satisfy God except that for once sin should be detested in due proportion to its hatefulness, that for once it should be mourned over as all its malice demanded. And none save the Incarnate God could rightly gauge this proportion, since none but He could know the full malice of sin, or teach us to hate it as it deserves. It was for this, therefore, that He came ; and, as St. Paul tells us, having in the days of His mortal life offered His prayers and supplications even with tears to Him Who was able to save Him from death, He taught us thus what is true Christian penitence. If therefore we bring to the Sacrament of Penance lukewarm or cold hearts, doubt not (concludes St. Bernard) but that it is to us, to our individual selves

that the Saviour addresses these words: *Weep not over Me, but weep for yourselves.*

For do you know what it is that will, more than all else, condemn us in the Judgment Day? Not so much our sins as our pretended contrition; our languid sorrow so unlike the fervour of the penitent Saviour; our superficial contrition, in which we know so well how to retain all our liberty of mind, all our freedom of heart, our keen relish for pleasure, our zest for society; that imaginary contrition, which does not affect us in the very least, and which by an infallible consequence does not in any degree whatever convert us. If we were acting in the spirit of faith, one single solitary sin would be enough to distract and agonize our whole soul, to overwhelm us with the terror which took possession of Cain, to make us utter the same lamentations as were forced from Esau by the loss of his inheritance and of his father's blessing, to make us tremble like that King of Babylon who read his own awful sentence in the handwriting upon the wall; nay, let us rather say, to make us feel in our inmost heart, as the Apostle says (Philip. ii. 5), what our Divine Lord felt in His Sacred Heart. But because the habit of sin has by slow degrees hardened our hearts, what terrified Jesus no longer even surprises us; what stirred all His emotions no longer moves us. *Oh, Lord!* cried David, and this should be our cry too, *heal my soul;* heal it of the deadly wound of insufficient contrition. Let us no longer abuse the Sacrament of Penance, treating it as a mere ceremony; but ever keeping before our eyes this perfect Model of true contrition, let penance be to us a true turning back from the crooked ways of sin, a true change of heart and life, a true conversion. If we cannot weep bitterly enough

for our sins let us at least weep for our insensibility ; let us weep that we do not weep, and grieve that we do not grieve. So only can we attain to true contrition and begin to imitate our penitent Saviour.

Come with me now from the Garden in which Jesus prayed, to the Hill of Calvary on which He expired. There contemplate with me this crucified God, the Author and Finisher of our faith, Who, instead of living a calm and happy life, dies a most cruel and ignominious death. Gazing upon this marvellous spectacle, I venture to ask God the reason of it ; I appeal from it to His wisdom, His justice, His goodness ; and, Christian though I am, I feel almost ready with the unbelieving Jew to call the mystery of my Redemption a scandal. What ! do I behold the most innocent of men treated as the guiltiest and delivered up to the fury of implacable executioners ! But God, Who is jealous of the glory of His attributes, God Who cannot suffer me to hold so erroneous a belief, dashes it in a moment to the ground. He reveals to me that this Death upon the Cross is the penalty of my sins ; He obliges me to own that all that is passing upon Calvary is justly ordained, wisely conducted, divinely and piously executed. And why ? Because nothing less could be sufficient for the punishment of sin ; and because, as St. Jerome tells us, had there been stored up in the treasury of the wrath of God no other punishments for sin than those of which our reason approves, that reason being limited and sin from its very nature being in a measure infinite, God could never have been fully and entirely satisfied.

I would have you consider seriously that our great mistake is to measure the doings of our Divine Saviour by what He is in Himself, not by what He desired to

be for us ; to regard His Passion in connection with the Jews who were only its instruments, and never in relation to God Who was its principal agent and sovereign arbiter. Let me put it more clearly. Jesus Christ is in Himself truly the King of Saints, the Beloved Son in Whom the Eternal Father is well pleased, the Chief of the Elect, the Source of all blessings, Incarnate Holiness. Therefore our reason revolts on beholding such a one suffering. Yet we forget that on Calvary He, so to speak, ceased to be all that ; that, instead of being the very embodiment of all those qualities which were for the time veiled and apparently eclipsed, He found Himself reduced to be, in the language of Scripture, a curse for us, to be the victim of sin, and, since St. Paul has said it I may say with him and in the same sense of the word, to be sin itself (2 Cor. v. 21). Now, as St. Chrysostom says, in such a condition as this there was no kind of suffering which was not our Lord's due : humiliations, insults, scourging, the nails, the thorns, the Cross, all these went to make up the wages of sin. Looking upon the matter in this light, can we say that our Divine Redeemer suffered too much, since He was then representing sin and had undertaken to be treated by His Eternal Father as embodied sin ? No, we cannot. His charity, says St. Bernard, was most full and abundant, yet not lavish. He calls Himself the man of sorrows ; but, says Tertullian, it is a fitting title since He is the man of sin. We see Him indeed buffeted, scourged, derided ; yet nothing of all that is heaped on Him by His tormentors, though it may far outstep the limits of Pilate's sentence, can outstep the sentence pronounced by God upon sin. He dies upon the Cross ; yes, but that is the gibbet on which sin, in the person of the

Saviour, should hang. Put your thoughts and feelings on this stupendous event into their right order. When you contemplate the Lamb of God as He hangs upon the Cross, instead of being absorbed in the consideration of His spotless innocence, remind yourselves that it is for your secret sins and open crimes that He is thus sacrificed ; for your excesses, your intemperance, your shameful pleasures. Then accusing yourselves, you will cry out : My sins deserved this scourging, they deserved the cruel wounds inflicted by these thorns, these nails which pierced His hands and feet ; He bears those sins of mine, therefore the Eternal Father must in His perfect justice forget that He is His Son and look upon Him as His enemy. Not all the hatred of the Jews, veiled under the cloak of religious zeal and deadly in the malice of its cruelty, could have sufficed to punish one thus laden with the crimes of the whole human race ; it needed (says St. Ambrose) the intervention of a God, and that is what faith reveals to us.

This is what I ask you to bear in mind : that not the Council of the Jews but the Eternal Father Himself delivered up Jesus into the hands of His executioners, and this by the express decree of Divine wisdom. St. Peter openly declared this in the Synagogue : *Jesus being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God* (Acts ii. 23) ; and asserts it with no fear lest his hearers should take advantage of the statement to stifle their remorse for the act of deicide which they had committed.

True it is that the Pharisees and the Doctors of the Law have conspired against Jesus to put Him to death, but not, O God, till Thou hast first laid Thy hand on Him ; as says David : *They have persecuted Him*

Whom Thou hast smitten (Ps. lxviii. 27). Up to this moment they have respected Him, and, however much they may have hated Him, have not dared to make any attempt upon His person ; but now, O God, that Thy hand is heavy upon Him, their fury bursts all bounds, they are ready to do their worst. For now at last they are permitted to work their will upon the one only Victim Who could atone for the sins of not one world but of a million worlds (if such there were), the only Victim capable of satisfying Thy rigorous justice, Thine outraged majesty. And it would seem that the wrath of God cannot be appeased by anything less than that supreme agony which is the torture of the damned, that sense of being forsaken, abandoned by God. Since that is the culminating point of the punishment of sin, even that desolation too must be experienced by the Crucified, by the sinless yet sin-laden Son of God. Therefore He cries aloud : *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?*

That is what sin cost the Incarnate Word. Such is the penitence of a God. What does sin cost us ? What is our penitence, guilty wretches as we are ? Well may He say : *Weep not for Me, but for yourselves.* Ah ! what a contrast between His attitude towards sin and yours ! He dies, the spotless, the all-holy One, His body torn and bleeding, His head crowned with thorns ; He dies upon a Cross, fastened to it with the cruel nails. And you, deserving of all the chastisements of Heaven, live on an easy, careless, self-indulgent life. Ah ! dear Lord, since sin was the cause of Thy Passion and Death, and since our daily sins renew again and again Thy bitter agony, make us to hate them more and more and to do penance for them more perfectly than we have hitherto done.

II. Sad and ignominious as His Passion may seem to us, it must have been to Jesus Himself an object of complaisance, since by a secret miracle of love and wisdom the Incarnate God willed that this Mystery should be continued and solemnly renewed in His Church till the end of the world. For what else is the Eucharist but a perpetual renewal of the Saviour's Passion, and what was His object in instituting the Blessed Eucharist but that all that passed upon Calvary should not only be represented but actually accomplished on our altars? That is to say, that He Himself, still to-day as on Calvary our Victim, is on these altars again and at every moment sacrificed; as if it were not sufficient for Him to have suffered once, unless He had at the same time in the ingenuity of His almighty love given to His adorable sufferings that stamp of perpetuity which they have in this Sacrament, and which render it so salutary for us. Yes, the love of a God devised this for us; but, marvel of marvels, at the very same time that Jesus in the Sacrifice of the Eucharist renews in a wonderful way His sacred Passion, men also continue to renew that passion profanely, sacrilegiously, by their evil lives, their mortal sins, which even now, on the throne of His glory where He reigns victorious and adored by countless angels, pierce His Sacred Heart afresh and make the wounds with which He was wounded in the house of His friends bleed again. Let me show you that this is truly so, taking one by one the details of His Passion till the picture is filled up. What do we see on that canvas?

A God betrayed and abandoned by cowardly disciples! O Divine Saviour, such was Thy fate. These are Thine own chosen friends and companions; yet

by one Thou art sold, by another denied, by all forsaken. Well, and this wound has been reopened again and again throughout the ages by men bearing the name of Christians but ashamed to maintain it, too cowardly to fight for the Faith, ready to follow Thee when it costs them nothing to do so, fair-weather Christians who in temptation or persecution, or sometimes even under the slightest pressure of circumstances, fall away and forsake Thee.

A God condemned to death by hypocritical priests! Let us not too closely discuss this point, lest in any way the respect which you owe to the ministers of the Lord should be affected. God forbid that I should undertake to judge those whose lips can call down upon the altar the Body of Jesus Christ. But I would ask you to remember, though with fear and loathing, that through all the ages of Christianity the greatest persecutors of Jesus Christ have been not licentious laymen but bad priests; and that among such those whose sin is covered by the veil of hypocrisy are His most cruel and dangerous enemies.

A God mocked and derided in the palace of Herod by impious courtiers! This was doubtless one of the most galling indignities which our Lord had to endure. Yet do not imagine that this outrage was confined to the court of that irreligious prince. It passed on from thence, down through the ages, taking up its abode in the courts of Christian princes, in which the Saviour of the world has been and is often despised and mocked. It is true that He may be outwardly adored there, but at heart how do they regard His precepts, what do they know or think of His humility, His poverty, His sufferings? To ensure a good reception at court you need pomp and display; to maintain your position there,

artifice and intrigue ; to gain the ear of princes and courtiers, obsequiousness and flattery.

A God put on the same level as Barabbas, and to Whom Barabbas is preferred by a blind and inconstant people ! How many times have not we, like the Jews, done this outrage to Jesus ? How many times, after having received Him as it were in triumph in Holy Communion, have we not yielded to some degrading impulse, and for the sake of some poor pleasure, some mean interest, some idle passion, preferred in truth the creature to the Creator, chosen Barabbas rather than Jesus ? It is St. Chrysostom who gives this application to the words of the Evangelist. Conscience, which in spite of ourselves presides within us as a judge, whispers indeed to us : ' What are you going to do ; here is your pleasure on one side, your God on the other : for which side will you declare yourself ? You cannot keep both, you must lose your pleasure or your God. It is for you to decide.' And passion which masters our hearts makes us answer : ' I choose my pleasure.' ' But,' conscience whispers softly, ' what then will become of your God ? ' ' I intend to satisfy my own desires and to have my own way,' passion retorts. ' But,' again urges conscience, ' if you persist in giving yourself this pleasure, you will crucify your God afresh by your own act, in your own person ? ' ' It matters not,' passion replies ; ' let Him be crucified, if only I can satisfy my desires.' So the battle rages, day by day, between conscience and passion in the hearts of men. So it is with you and with me ; so it has been whenever we have fallen into grievous sin, that sin which puts to death Jesus Christ as well as our own souls.

A God exposed to insults, treated as a mock king by a crowd of pretended worshippers ! What a sight for

Christian eyes to contemplate! Jesus the Eternal Word, clothed in a coarse purple robe, a reed in His hand, a crown of thorns upon His brow, delivered up to an insolent soldiery to be treated as a stage king! And all this is but a picture of the impieties which are daily committed by so-called Christians during the celebration of the most solemn of our Mysteries. The Saviour of the world is hidden under the sacramental species on our altars, but beneath that veil He is always God and always worthy of our adoration. And yet what homage do we pay Him there? Alas! we have but to open our eyes to what goes on around us, and sorrowfully to acknowledge what is one of the greatest scandals of which Christianity can be convicted. Were He to appear there in all His majesty as He will manifest Himself in His second coming, you would be overwhelmed with fear; "yet," says St. Bernard, "the more He abases Himself, the more worthy is He of our reverence, since it is His love and not necessity that reduces Him to this state of humiliation." What think you of your God? What idea have you conceived of Him? If He held in your minds the place that He ought to hold there, could you come to insult Him at His very feet? For you do that whenever, before His altar, you dare to give way to wilful distractions, to lounge in disrespectful postures, to trifle in a thousand idle and irreverent ways as if you were in a place of public amusement. That I call insulting the majesty of Jesus. Again, I tell you that you insult the humility of Jesus when you flaunt before His eyes the vanities and the luxuries of the world. Once more, you insult the holiness of Jesus when you presume to bring into His house and near to His tabernacle a sinful passion which has taken possession

of your body and soul, degrading both and profaning the abiding-place of the All-Holy and All-Pure.

And now we come to the last and greatest detail of the picture. We see before us a God Crucified. The pitiless cruelty of men doing its worst, putting the finishing stroke to their deadly attack upon the innocent person of the Son of God. For 4000 years the justice of the Eternal Father had been waiting for this death of Christ on the Cross; and therefore, terrible as that Cross is, the Divine Son looks upon it with satisfaction, because in it He sees the punishment of our sins and the reparation for the insults done to the glory of God. Yet in proportion to His satisfaction in this first Cross is His horror at that other cross which day by day our sins prepare for Him. It is not (says St. Augustine) of the sharpness and anguish of that first Cross that He complains, but of the weight and hardness of the other which seems to Him almost insupportable. He knew that His own Cross, ignominious as it was, would pass from Calvary to the brow of emperors; He foresaw that His Death would be the salvation of the world, and that the Eternal Father would in days to come make all this shame and suffering so glorious that it would be the hope and the joy of the world. But as for this other cross to which we ourselves nail Him by our sins, what is there in that to give Him any consolation? He sees in it His love despised, His graces rejected, the unworthy objects of passion preferred to the Creator. If, then, the sun withdrew its light at the moment of the Crucifixion on Calvary, should it not again and again be darkened, sinners, by your disorderly lives, your excesses, your crimes? For it is by these that you again and again renew the Passion of Jesus Christ. Nor do I tell you

this on my own authority; St. Paul says it to the Hebrews: *Crucifying again to themselves the Son of God, and making Him a mockery* (Heb. vi. 6). Seeing then that not the Jews alone but you also have crucified and do daily crucify the Saviour by every sin which stains your life and corrupts your heart, is not this cause for tears—tears even more for yourselves than for Him, since you not only are the authors of His Death, but also cause His Death to be hurtful to you.

III. That there are men, even Christians, to whom in the secret judgments of God the Passion of Jesus, beneficial though it is, becomes unavailing, is a truth of our religion too essential to be ignored and too fatal not to be deplored. This thought it was that stirred the soul of St. Paul when he said to the Galatians: *Has Christ then died in vain?* Here, however, a thought strikes me—a thought which, though apparently quite contrary to that of the Apostle, yet serves to strengthen and confirm it. St. Paul grieves because it seems as if Jesus had suffered in vain; whereas I could almost be consoled if it had only been that He had suffered in vain, if it had only been that His Passion had been rendered useless by our sins. What fills me with consternation is that at the same time that, by our own doing, His Passion becomes useless to us, it also becomes absolutely injurious to us. For (says St. Gregory of Nazianzen) this Passion partakes of the nature of those remedies which kill if they do not cure, and the effect of which is either to give life or to be changed into poison. Attend to this, I entreat you. Remember what happened at the close of the judgment of the Son of God, at the moment of His condemnation, when Pilate, washing his hands before the Jews, declared

that he was innocent of the blood of this just man and that on them the guilt must rest and that they must answer for it ; and when they with one voice cried out that they consented to this and were willing that His Blood should be upon them and upon their children. You know what those words have cost them, you know what curse that fearful imprecation brought down upon them ; from that moment the wrath of Heaven burst like a thunder-cloud over their nation. God condemned them out of their own mouth ; what was intended to save them was made use of to destroy them : *His Blood be upon us and upon our children.*

Now all this shadows forth to us but dimly the awful maledictions which our abuse of the Merits and of the Passion of the Son of God must call down upon our heads. For, remember, every time that we allow ourselves to be carried away by the unruly passions of our heart and consent to a sin against which our conscience rebels, every time that we are led by the spirit of the world to resist a grace which urges and entreats us to obey God, we are, thoughtlessly and involuntarily but still most surely, pronouncing secretly the same sentence of death which the Jews pronounced against themselves before Pilate : *His Blood be upon us !* For this grace which we despise is the price of the Blood of Jesus, and this sin which we commit is an actual profanation of that same Blood. It is as if we said to God : 'I know, Lord, what I am doing, I know what risk I run ; but rather than not satisfy my passions I am willing that the Blood of Thy Son should be upon me : vengeance indeed belongs to Thee, I must bear the punishment ; but I must and will still grasp this guilty pleasure, only death shall tear it from me.'

Thus we condemn ourselves, and here is the solution

of that terrible mystery of eternal punishment with which Faith threatens us and against which our reason revolts. We despair of understanding it in this life and do not (says St. Chrysostom) consider that its explanation, clear and absolute, is offered to us in the Precious Blood of the Saviour, or, more truly speaking, in our daily profanation of that Blood. For (adds the holy Doctor) this Precious Blood suffices to render that eternity not less terrible but less incredible ; and for this reason. The Blood of Christ is of infinite dignity, therefore it can only be avenged by an infinite penalty. This Blood, if we are lost by our own doing, will rise up against us eternally before the Tribunal of God, and will eternally kindle His wrath against us. This Blood, falling upon the damned, will imprint upon them a stain that will never be effaced ; their torments, therefore, can never end. A lost soul in Hell will, in the sight of God, always be stained with the Blood which that soul had trampled under foot, and consequently will ever be an object of horror to God ; and as God's horror of His creatures is what constitutes Hell, it follows that Hell will be eternal. And in this, O my God, Thou art supremely just, supremely holy, most worthy of our praise and adoration : *Thou art just, O Lord, Who art and Who wast the Holy One, because Thou hast judged these things* (Apoc. xvi. 5). This very same explanation is given to God Himself by the Beloved Disciple : *Men have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink* (Apoc. xvi. 6),—an expression used in Holy Scripture to denote the last supreme efforts of Divine vengeance. Ah ! if the blood of the Prophets thus drew down the scourge of God's anger, what will not the Blood of Jesus Christ do ? If the blood of the Martyrs

cried aloud even to Heaven against the persecutors of the Faith, will not the Precious Blood of the Redeemer be an awful appeal before the Throne of God ?

Alas ! how tremendous is the alternative that is presented to us ! The Blood which flowed on Calvary demands either grace for us or justice against us. When we apply it to our souls by a lively faith and sincere repentance, it demands grace ; but when by our excesses and our sins we arrest its healing virtue, then it demands justice and infallibly obtains it. In this Blood (says St. Bernard) all just souls are purified ; but, by a strangely contrasting marvel, it is with this same Blood that sinners are stained and soiled, and thus, if I may venture to say so, render themselves more hideous in the sight of God.

Ah ! my God, shall I ever appear before Thine eyes stained with this Blood which washes away the sins of others ? If it were only indeed my own sins which so stained me, then, considering my misery, my weakness, my ignorance, the offence against Thee might be slight, and I might hope for a more lenient judgment ; but I see and know that these sins which cover me like a leprosy are so many acts of sacrilege against the Blood of Thy Divine Son, and against me therefore that Blood will cry aloud with a more piercing cry than did the blood of Abel against Cain. What then, O God of my soul, will become of me in Thy presence ! My dearest Lord, suffer not Thy Precious Blood to fall upon me thus ! Let it fall into me to sanctify me, not upon me to condemn me ! Into me, by good use of those graces that flow from the Divine Source of healing ; not upon me, by that blinding of the spirit and that hardening of the heart, which are of all penalties the most to be dreaded ! Into me, by participation in

the adorable Eucharist, which is its most precious fountain ; not upon me, by the curses attached to the contempt of the Sacraments ! Into me, by the regulation of my conduct and the practice of good works ; not upon me, by my wanderings, my infidelities, my obstinacy, my impenitence !

That is what we should ask of Jesus Crucified. It is with feelings such as these that we should kneel at the foot of His Cross, and gather up the precious drops which are streaming from it. May He be our Saviour, this God Who died to save us ; may He be such throughout the whole course of our life ; may He still be our Saviour in the hour of death, and at that supreme moment may His Cross be our support and our stay ; may He be our Saviour throughout that blessed Eternity in which He will make us share His glory.

III

THE NECESSITY OF SUFFERING

By Bossuet

"Let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us; looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. xii. 1, 2).

It was the will of our Heavenly Father that the laws imposed upon Christians should in the first place be written in Jesus Christ. We must indeed be formed according to the model set forth in the Gospel, but then that Gospel itself was formed upon Jesus Christ. He began (says Holy Scripture) *to do* before He began *to teach* (Acts i. 1); He practised first what He prescribed, so much so that though His teaching is indeed our law, yet the primal law is His most holy life. He is truly our Master and our Teacher, but before all things He is our Model.

In order thoroughly and effectively to comprehend this fundamental truth, we must keep our minds firmly fixed upon the one supremely important fact that the great mystery of Christianity is that a God willed to take upon Himself the likeness of man, so that He might impose upon man the law of conforming himself more and more to the Divine likeness. He willed to imitate us truly and actually in our human nature, in order that we might imitate Him in the sanctity of His conduct; He took our flesh, that we might take His

spirit ; in the mystery of the Incarnation He deigned to take our poor humanity for His model, that He might be ours in all the succeeding details of His earthly life : *Let us*, says St. Gregory of Nazianzen, *be like Jesus Christ, because of His own will He became like us ; let us for the love of Him become gods, because He for love of us willed to become man.* Ah ! here indeed a wonderful light, clear as noonday, is thrown upon the great truth which I am preaching to you, that of the necessity of suffering ! Yet let me warn you that we must assure ourselves of the firm, the unshakeable foundations of this so brightly illuminated truth, and those foundations are only to be found in the Sacred Scriptures.

The truth that in the mystery of the Incarnation the Son of God considered us as His model, we learn from St. Paul's inspired teaching in his Epistle to the Hebrews : *It behoved Him*, says the Apostle of the Gentiles, *in all things to be made like unto His brethren* (Heb. ii. 17) ; and again, in still more explicit language, he says to us : *Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself in like manner hath been partaker of the same* (Heb. ii. 14).

It is then very plainly shown that the Son of God at His coming into the world desired in His most holy Incarnation to regard us as His model. But why ? unless that He might, on His part, become our Pattern and Example. For as it is natural for men to receive some impression from what they behold, so, having found in the midst of us a God Who willed to resemble us, we from henceforth were firmly persuaded that there was no need to look any further afield in choosing a model for ourselves. *He did not take hold of the Angels* (Heb. ii.), because He had no desire to give a Model to

the Angels ; but *He took hold of the seed of Abraham*, because He willed to serve as a Pattern to the race of that Patriarch ; not to his seed according to the flesh, but to that spiritual seed which was to follow in the footprints of His Faith, that is, to the children of the New Covenant.

Thus we have in Jesus Christ a living Law, an inspired Rule of life and conduct. He who does not desire to live as Jesus Christ lived does not desire to be a Christian. This is why the Holy Scriptures with one unvarying voice preach to us that His life and actions are our example ; so that we are not even permitted to imitate the Saints except in as far as they imitated their Divine Master ; and St. Paul would never have dared to say with all the boldness and liberty of an Apostle, *Be ye followers of me*, had he not immediately added, *as I also am of Christ* (1 Cor. xi. 1). And again, the same Apostle, writing to the Thessalonians, says : *You became followers of us, and*, he adds, *of the Lord* (1 Thess. i. 6) ; in order to make us understand that however great an example may be offered to us by the Christian life, it is not worthy of the name unless it be formed upon Jesus Christ Himself.

And yet, accepting this truth, do not for one moment imagine that I am setting before you an undertaking of impossible magnitude. Let me prove the contrary by a very simple illustration. In a painting, any famous work of a great master which we are wishing and preparing to copy, two points have to be considered: the perfection and the details of the original. The copy, if it is to be a faithful one, must reproduce all the details of the great master's work ; but as to attaining to its perfection, that would be more than one could dare to hope. So too it is with the perfection

of our Divine Master. I do not tell you that you can ever reach it, ever arrive at that supreme height of excellence which is always reserved for the great original, but I do tell you that you ought to copy Him in the minutest details of His most holy life, following out as far as is possible His own guiding rule and principle, striving to grow like Him, because He deigned to become like us. *He took,* says the Apostle, *all our weaknesses, sin only excepted* (Heb. iv. 15); therefore we ought to take to ourselves all His virtues. He clothed Himself really and truly and wholly with our flesh; and we ought also really and truly and wholly, as far as is permitted to man, to clothe ourselves with the fulness of His spirit; because, as the Apostle tells us, *if any man has not the Spirit of Jesus Christ he is none of His* (Rom. viii. 9).

And now it remains for us to consider what *is* this spirit of Jesus, what we really mean by it. Well, even the most superficial study of Holy Scripture will suffice to convince us that it is a vigorous spirit, nourished by suffering, delighting in pains and afflictions. This is why the Prophet calls Him *the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with infirmity* (Isa. liii. 3). Does not this very phrase seem to tell us that the Eternal Wisdom from the first moment of His entrance into the world resolved to know nothing but affliction? To me it speaks of that knowledge which the Schools call experimental; and if we rightly understand its meaning, we shall realize that Jesus Christ, in the midst of those varied objects which on all sides appeal to our senses, never Himself tasted of any sweetness; that He never desired to know by experience anything but what was bitter and painful, nothing but sorrows and sufferings: truly and actually *a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with infirmi-*

ties. Not a single portion of His being failed to pass through the crucible of some keen and exquisite agony, because He desired to know by fullest experience every detail of that wonderful science which He came into the world to teach—the mystery of pain, the science of suffering.

And most certain it is that our Divine Lord was so absolutely born only to endure, and that to do this was so truly His sole employment, His daily practice, that when He saw the end of His sufferings at hand He no longer desired to prolong His life on earth. This fact we know from an incident recorded by St. John, himself an eye-witness of the Saviour's death upon the Cross. Hanging there, exhausted, dying, the Man of Sorrows, knowing that He has endured all that had been foretold by prophecy, excepting the tasting of that bitter drink which was to be brought to Him in His agonizing thirst, calls aloud for this with a piercing cry, not willing to lose one single drop in the chalice of His Passion : *I thirst.* And when His parched tongue has been touched by that unquenching bitter drink, when this last outrage has satisfied the undying hatred of His enemies, then the Crucified Redeemer, seeing that in the Eternal Decrees nothing more remained for Him to suffer, speaks again from the Cross : *It is consummated* (John xix. 30) ; *there is nothing more for Me to do in this world.* Nothing more, O Man of Sorrows, Thou Who hast come among us to learn what are our infirmities ; there are now no further sufferings left for Thee to experience ; Thy knowledge is perfected, its measure is filled up to the brim, the whole catalogue of human woes and agonies has been run through, now death may come as soon as it pleases Thee ; yes, death may come to close Thy mortal life.

And indeed so it was: *Bowing His head, He gave up the ghost* (John xix. 30).

This picture stirs your emotions, but we must add to it yet another detail, to make you understand the full extent of our Divine Lord's thirst for suffering. He willed to endure much more than the redemption of our nature demanded; and for this reason. If He had confined Himself to the endurance of those sufferings only which the necessity of expiating our sins required, we should not have formed a just estimate of His attitude towards suffering; we might have been inclined to suspect that He regarded it rather as a necessary evil than as a desirable good. Therefore it was that it was not sufficient for Him to die for us, thus paying back to His Eternal Father by the sacrifice of Himself what the just vengeance of that Father demanded of the public Victim of all sinners. No, this was not enough. Beyond and above this mere discharge of debt, His mind projected itself into that region of strange mystic delight which we call suffering. In the words of Tertullian: *He desires, before dying, to satiate Himself with the pleasures of enduring* Following out the idea of this great writer, may we not say that the life of the Saviour was a banquet, at which the Divine Guest drank only of the waters of affliction, and ate only of the bitter herbs of sorrow and suffering? Truly a strange banquet as the world reckons these things! Yet Jesus found it sweet to His taste. His Death would have availed for our salvation, but would not have appeased His eager, ardent thirst for suffering; therefore we see not only the Cross as it was reared aloft on Mount Calvary, but also grouped around it all the instruments of the Passion: the scourge, the lance, the nails, the crown of thorns,

terrible indeed to look upon, but chosen by Himself to satisfy that fervent, that unmeasurable longing.

Well, do you now understand a little better what I am trying to bring home to you as regards this law of suffering ? Can you see it written in sufficiently plain characters upon our Model ? Look upon Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith ; look upon Him in His Passion, in the throes of this supremest agony ; they are the birth-pangs of your own new life ; the grace which sanctifies you, the spirit which regenerates you flows down upon you, with His Precious Blood, from those torn and lacerated veins. Children of sorrow and anguish, do you think to save your souls in the midst of luxury and softness ? It is the fashion nowadays to make a sort of study of refinement, to affect perhaps even more fastidiousness than we actually feel. It is considered the right thing to draw the line of separation between ourselves and the vulgar crowd by avoiding the very smallest discomfort and inconvenience ; this (we think) proves that we have been brought up in an atmosphere of refinement and grandeur. Ah, what a miserable falling off in the standard of a Christian's life ! Is it possible that you think you can save your souls without bearing upon those souls the impress of the Saviour's character ? Do you not hear St. Peter telling you that *Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps* (1 Peter ii. 21) ; and St. Paul preaching to us that *we must be conformed to His death, that we may be sharers in His glorious Resurrection* (Phil. iii. 10–11) ? Nay, do you not hear Jesus Christ Himself telling you that if you would march under His banner, you must make up your minds to carry your cross as He carried His (Luke xiv. 27) ? This bearing

of the cross is the badge and token of our membership, our fellowship with Jesus Christ. His thirst for suffering cannot be quenched unless He suffers in His whole Body and in all its members. Now *we*, says St. Paul, *are members of His Body, of His Flesh and of His Bone* (Ephes. v. 31). This is why the same Apostle even ventures to say that something is wanting in the Passion of Jesus Christ if He does not suffer in all the members of His Mystical Body, as by His own will He did in those of His natural Body (Col. i. 24).[1]

Ah! how great a mystery this is! Only by contemplation of Jesus in the Garden of the Agony and on the Hill of Crucifixion can we penetrate its depths. For as the Precious Blood then flowed so freely that every member, every part of the Sacred Body, was dyed with it, so, we learn, must the Church, His Mystical Body, and the faithful who are His members, be plunged into that crimson sea and marked with the impression of His Cross and Passion.

What then, you say; if we are to give our blood to Jesus, must the Neros and Domitians and all the other persecutors of the Christian faith be revived? and their cruel edicts be once again promulgated, delivering up innocent believers to public vengeance? No, no, God forbid that the world to-day should be so hostile to the truth as it was in the days of our forefathers. There is another way in which we can give our very heart's blood to the Saviour; and that is by suffering humbly all the afflictions that God may send us; our cheerful resignation takes the place of martyrdom. And never fear lest material for the exercising of our patience should be wanting. Nature can supply us

[1] See the late Mgr. R. H. Benson's book *Christ in the Church* Part IV) for a development of this consideration.

with infirmities enough to do the work of the racks and gyves of our forefathers. When God lays His hand upon us, trying us, either by sickness or bereavement or any other keen affliction, if we offer to Him in humble submission a heart wounded and bleeding, we are giving our blood to our Saviour ; and since we are told in the holy Epistles that the love of earth's perishable delights is as much a part of us as our very flesh and blood, then the curbing and restraining of that love which can only be rooted out by sheer force is the giving of our blood to Jesus.

Again, it is certain that all the work done truly for our Lord is a giving of our blood to Him. Let us work then for His glory ; not half-heartedly, but with great zeal, with a pure intention, with one aim only, with unwearying diligence. Again, what can be more pleasing to Jesus than our penitence? The bitter tears which we shed for our sins, St. Augustine calls " the blood of our souls " ; and when we pour them forth before God, bewailing our ingratitude, are we not indeed giving Him blood ? I said too that nature never failed to supply us with food for patience. The perplexities of business, the injustice of the world, the inconstancy of friends, the unfair judgment of our neighbours, their contradicting tempers, our own infirmities of mind and body—ah ! it is not the Gospel only, but the world and nature which will always impose upon us the law of suffering. It only remains for us to draw from that suffering the fruits which must be expected from every good Christian. Let us consider what those fruits are.

The Penitent Sufferer

Think for one moment of the Resurrection, of Jesus Christ coming forth from the Tomb crowned with glory and honour. Think of the dazzling radiance, the light of immortality shining from His Sacred Wounds and clothing His Divine Body in a robe brighter than the sun at noonday. Think of this; it would be enough to convince you of the marvellous result produced by the right use of suffering. Yet our Divine Lord did not wait for that first Easter morning to teach us this. Without leaving His Cross, He taught us by a great example what are the consolations of those who suffer patiently. Not in His own Sacred Person—that could not be, because to the very end He must be an example of absolute desolation and abandonment—but in the Penitent Thief at His side, whom He inspired with such Christian piety, contrition, resignation in the midst of suffering, that He could with His own sacred lips promise him an eternal reward, the crown of a conqueror bestowed upon the spot. *This day thou shalt be with Me* (Luke xxiii. 43).

There is no need to enlarge upon the fact, so well known to every Christian, that God has a special love for all suffering souls. What I shall try to impress upon you is the cause of this love; I should rather say the causes, for there are several. And the first that occurs to me is the contrition of a penitent heart. We know that a heart contrite and humbled by the remembrance of past sin is a sacrifice of great price in God's eyes and an oblation sweeter than all the perfumes of Arabia. But never is this sacrifice of humiliation more acceptable than when offered in the midst of suffering; for we know by experience that many who

are hardened and impenitent in the time of prosperity, never perhaps giving a thought to their crimes, yet, when pain and sorrow overtake them, often wake up suddenly to the consciousness of those sins and are ready to confess them. And this because deep down in our inmost soul there lurks a secret conviction of the justice of Almighty God, and at the same time of His infinite goodness towards His creatures; so that even the obstinate sinner who in the whirl of pleasure has forgotten his sins and said in his heart that *God has forgotten them* (Ps. ix. 34), when struck by the thunderbolt of suffering, begins to fear His judgments and confesses with bitterness the disorders of his past life.

So it was with the Penitent Thief upon the Cross. He hears his comrade blaspheming, and wonders (with reason) that the vengeance which has overtaken him has not humbled him before Divine Justice. *What!* he cries, *dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art under the same condemnation?* You see how his terrible suffering recalls to his mind the fear of God and a vision of His judgments; this brings him to a humble confession of his sins. *As for us,* he continues, *we receive the due reward of our deeds* (Luke xxiii. 41). See how he humbles himself, how he kisses the hand that strikes him, how he acknowledges and adores the justice that chastises him. This is the only means of changing that justice into mercy; for God, Who desires not the everlasting death of a sinner but only his conversion and salvation, never strikes in this life except to humble us and deliver us from eternal vengeance. Let us, then, at the first blow dealt by Divine Justice, humble ourselves in the dust, crying with our whole heart: *We receive the punishment due to our sins* (Luke xxiii. 41);

Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgment is right (Ps. cxviii. 137). But more than this. Let us look upon Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith ; let us imitate the happy Thief who, having acknowledged himself to be a malefactor, turns a glance full of love and devotion upon the innocent Divine Sufferer at his side, crying aloud : *But this Man hath done no evil!* (Luke xxiii. 41). This thought soothes his agony, for if the just endures ought the guilty to complain ? When we suffer, let us always console ourselves with this consideration. Jesus Christ the Guiltless suffered as we suffer, but He submitted to suffering in mercy to us ; we sinners have no choice, the inevitable law of justice imposes suffering upon us. Then, sinners as we are, let us suffer for the love of the Just, for love of the infinite Mercy which saves us, which exposes spotless Innocence to such ignominy ; let us suffer the salutary corrections of that Justice which indeed chastises, but which also protects and spares us. This is the sacrifice well-pleasing to God, this is the sweet-smelling holocaust ; with such feelings as those we shall take Heaven by storm, and the gates of Paradise will be opened to us : *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.*

But afflictions do not only serve to make us conscious of our sins ; they are a spiritual furnace in which Christian virtue is tested and rendered worthy of the eyes of God Himself and of the perfection of the future state. That virtue must be tried as gold in the fire, is a well-known truth and constantly impressed upon us in the Holy Scriptures ; but we should remember that the fire not only tries gold, but it also makes its reality or its spuriousness known. If it is true metal, the fire purifies and refines it ; and this is exactly what afflic-

tions do with regard to Christian virtue. Until it has been tried in the furnace of affliction, it is never assured. Just as we do not know what a soldier really is until he has been in battle, so it is with Christian virtue. It is not meant for show or display, but for use and for conflict ; it does not know itself till it has struggled and fought. This is why St. Paul will not give it leave to hope till it has been tried. He says : *Patience worketh trial, and trial worketh hope* (Rom. v. 4).

Ah ! what mistakes are made in this matter ! Men talk of the future life, they aspire to the crown of immortality ; and yet they live careless, self-indulgent lives, and when the trials come which God has planned for His servants, how does their faith, their apparent piety stand the test of affliction ? Loss of fortune, sickness, no matter what the trial may be—alas, these souls are proved to be false metal ; it shone brightly enough in the sunlight, but it melts in the crucible ; it could deceive men by a vain show of virtue, but is not worthy of God or fit for life eternal.

No Christian worthy of the name should complain of losses, disappointments, bereavements, because he must know that even in our purest affections, in our most legitimate earthly interests, there mingles a something born of our love of the world, a dross which debases our fine gold, taints the perfection of our virtue. Ah, if you only realized, poor human heart, how easily that world gets hold of you, yes, and how easily yet insensibly you bend yourself to it, you would bless the loving Hand which violently snaps these cords by disturbing the even tenor of your life, and taking away these temporal goods to which your heart clung too fondly ! St. Augustine says : *This man must learn by losing his possessions how much he sinned in loving them.*

Yes, and nothing but loss will convince us how frail and fleeting are all earthly joys, how imperishable and how incorruptible those eternal joys which we had perhaps almost forgotten. Thus a small evil will cure great ones, and the furnace of affliction will purify our virtue by separating it from its dross.

If we wish to realize the love of God for virtue thus perfected by suffering, we need only turn our eyes again upon that happy penitent, the dying Thief of whom I have already reminded you. Yes, we have looked upon him as a penitent perfected in that penitence by suffering, we have heard him acknowledging the justice of his condemnation ; but now regard him in another light. A saint, in all the grandeur of an ardent faith and a passionate devotion, speaks to the Divine Sufferer to Whose innocence he has just so boldly borne witness in the face of a raging multitude ; *Lord*, he cries, *remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom* (Luke xxiii. 42). Oh, boundless faith ! could anything surpass it ? A dying man sees Jesus dying and asks of Him life ! a crucified man sees Jesus crucified and asks of Him a Kingdom ; his eyes behold only Crosses, yet his faith only represents to him a Throne ! What faith ! what hope ! When we die we know that Jesus Christ lives, yet our wavering faith can scarcely trust in Him. This man sees Jesus dying with him, and places all his hope in Him ; and at what a time ! in the midst of what surroundings ! At a time when the whole world is condemning Jesus, when even His own are forsaking Him, it is reserved for him alone (says St. Augustine) to glorify Him on the Cross ; *his faith began to blossom when that of even the Apostles had withered*. The Disciples had forsaken Him Whom they knew to be the Author of life, and this man acknow-

ledges as his Master the companion of his torture and death. Surely, says St. Augustine, he deserves to hold a high rank in the triumphant army of martyrs, since he, almost alone, remained close to Jesus, doing what they who should have been its leaders and captains would have done. Ah, happy thief! now we know to what a height faith and piety can raise those who in the school of affliction learn to suffer with Jesus Christ. Happy thief! this it was which drew for him those wonderful words of consolation from the lips of the Son of God: *Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise* (Luke xxiii. 43). *This day;* how soon! *With Me;* what companionship! *In Paradise;* what rest!

But there are souls so callous that the gentler aspect of piety cannot soften them, and for such as these I must for a while dwell upon the terrible example of that other thief to whom the bitter suffering of the cross brought no repentance, and I must remind you of the consequent vengeance which descended upon him.

The Impenitent Sufferer

His example is sufficient to establish my position when I affirm that the cross, which is, if we will have it so, a certain pledge of mercy, may be turned by our own malice into an instrument of vengeance. So true is it, as says St. Augustine, that the point is *not what we suffer, but in what spirit we suffer;* that the afflictions which God sends us may easily change their nature, according to the spirit in which we receive them.

The hardened and impenitent who suffer without being converted begin their hell even in this life. No need to try and call up before our shuddering imagina-

tion the terrible picture of that region of the lost where the fires that burn on to all eternity only make the blackness of darkness more visible, and where there is no silence but only the discordant clamour of wailing and moaning and despairing weeping. If you want a vivid picture of Hell and of a lost soul, look upon a man who suffers and has no thought of turning away from sin and being converted to God.

In fact, the distinguishing characteristic of Hell is not so much pain, but pain without repentance. Holy Scripture speaks of two sorts of fire—that which purges, and that which consumes and devours. *The fire shall try every man's work* (1 Cor. iii. 13). *With devouring fire* (Isa. xxiii. 14). The Gospel calls the latter *a fire* which *is not extinguished* (Mark ix. 47), to distinguish it from that fire which is kindled only to purify us, and which never fails to die out when it has done its work.

Nothing on earth, then, can be more terrible than the condition of a man whom the chastening hand of God has not brought to repentance, because that condition is a foretaste of eternal damnation ; the man already bears its awful impress on his brow. It is of such as those that the Apocalypse says that *God having afflicted them with horrible wounds, they blasphemed Him and did not penance* (Apoc. xvi. 9). Truly their example should be a warning to us, teaching all sinners that it is not enough to suffer much, and that they must not persuade themselves that because this life has been full of pains and miseries the next will be one of peace and rest. Many are on the cross, yet far from the Crucified ; to some the cross is a grace, to others a vengeance. Was it not so with the two thieves ? Both were crucified with Jesus Christ—one in that crucifixion found mercy, the other the utmost rigour of justice ; one by

means of it worked out his salvation, the other by it began his damnation. The cross raised the patience of one to Paradise, it dashed the impenitence of the other down to Hell. Tremble then, sinners, in the midst of your sufferings; fear lest instead of experiencing now a fire which shall in time purge you, you should kindle by your sins a flame which shall devour you through all eternity.

But as for you, loving and obedient children of Jesus Christ, whatever scourge may descend upon you, never for one moment believe that God forgets you. Never persuade yourselves that you are confounded with the wicked, although you are tried by the same afflictions as befall them, by the same wars and pestilences, bereavements and losses. *The Lord knoweth who are His* (2 Tim. ii. 19); He can separate His own from the confused ranks of suffering mortality. The same fire makes the gold glitter and the straw smoke. The same action of stirring, says St. Augustine, brings out the ill savour of mud and the sweet odour of perfumes. Good wine is not mistaken for the lees, though both are trodden in the same wine-press. Thus the same afflictions which reduce the wicked to despair, purify the just; and though you may have to endure reproach, you will never be confounded if only you have courage and strength sufficient to know yourselves.

The hand of God, invisible to you but most assuredly there behind the things of sense, offers you this bitter potion of suffering, the true medicine of your souls. Take the cup calmly, nay, joyfully; drink it to the very dregs, and thank the good Physician Whose love has mixed the draught for you. St. James bids us rejoice in every affliction that befalls us, knowing that the trial of our faith works patience, and that our

patience must be perfect if we too would be perfect, wanting nothing. *Blessed,* he says, *is the man who endures the temptations and miseries of this life, for when his virtue has been sufficiently tried he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him* (Jas. i.). Remember that temptation will not last for ever ; yet a little while and this brief span of our earthly life will have passed like a winter's day in which morning and evening touch each other so closely. When a sick man parched with fever's thirst calls for drink, his nurses hurry to bring it ; yet to him it seems long before the longed-for draught moistens his lips. So it is with us. *This day,* says the Son of God. Fear not, it will be very soon. We call this life a day ; nay, it is but a moment ; only our weariness and infirmity make it seem long. When it is past, you will understand how short it really was. Ah, when that future life opens upon you, then you will see and know indeed !

What ! are you still groaning under the weight of these present sufferings ? Why, you are but adding another woe to all the rest. Impatience, murmuring, will rob you of all the merit of your sufferings. You will add sin to misery. Be patient, suffer gladly ; then like the Penitent Thief you shall hear these blessed words : *With Me in Paradise.*

IV

THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST

By Bossuet

"The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Is. liii. 6).

It belongs to God alone to speak to us of His greatness; and to Him alone it belongs to tell us of His abasement. We can never have conceptions lofty enough to enable us to speak rightly of the Divine greatness; and as regards His humiliation, we could never dare to entertain thoughts so low as fitly to express its fathomless depth. In both cases alike, God and God alone must mark out the boundary line beyond which human thought and human speech dare not venture. Now therefore when I am considering and bringing before your consideration the thought of our Divine Lord charged with and convicted of more crimes than were ever imputed to the blackest criminal in this world's history, be sure that I shall keep most rigidly within that boundary line marked out by the hand of the Eternal Father. The Prophet Isaiah himself, speaking of the Saviour, says: *And we have thought Him as it were a leper* (Is. liii. 4); that is, not only as a man scarred with innumerable wounds and sores, but as one literally clothed as with a garment in those hideous sins of which leprosy was the type. O holy and Divine Leper! O most just and innocent One bowed down

under the shameful burden of the sins of the whole world ! as I look upon Thee thus oppressed and humiliated, I will never for one instant forget that only by bearing the punishment due to those sins couldst Thou be quit of their awful weight of ignominy.

And it was upon you, O saving Cross, once the tree of shame but now the object of a world's adoration, it was upon you that the Divine Saviour paid, to the very last farthing, that stupendous debt ! You bore the price of our Salvation, you are the Tree of Life yielding for us the fruit of immortality ! O holy Cross, venerated by the whole Church of God, help me to imprint your image upon every heart ; and that I may the better set forth the humiliations of Jesus, let me bow down in adoration of His self-abasement, crying out : *Hail, holy Cross !*

There is one thought on which we will only dwell for a moment, and even for that space of time simply because of its bearing on the condition of our suffering and dying Lord hanging upon that Cross of shame and laden with *the iniquity of us all.* That thought is, that the first punishment of a sinner is that of being delivered over to himself ; and assuredly it is a most just punishment. Sin, says St. Augustine, brings with it its own penalty ; whoever commits a crime is the first to punish himself for it, witness that worm which never dies, the gnawing remorse, the restless disquietude of a troubled conscience. All that proves to us clearly enough that the sinner is himself his own punishment ; and if we do not experience this punishment in our present life, God will most certainly make us do so, fully and terribly, in the life to come.

Now let us turn from generalities to the one absorbing thought of our suffering Saviour. The moment

having at last come when He was to appear as a criminal before His judges and before the assembled multitude of His enemies, the Eternal Father begins to make Him feel the weight, the crushing burden of sin, by the punishment which He actually inflicts upon Himself. Hitherto, all through the course of His earthly life, He has spoken of His passion with joy. He has longed with an ardent longing for that supreme hour which He calls His own (John xiii. 1), as the completion of His mission, as the crowning act of that most Divine Life. But that serene peace, that tranquil calmness of spirit is not to last ; in the secret, eternal dispensation of Providence it is decreed that the Saviour of the world shall go forth to meet death with fear and trembling, because He is to go to meet it as a criminal, because He is to afflict and to trouble Himself. This is why the Divine Sufferer, feeling His hour approaching, says sorrowfully : *Now is My soul troubled* (John xii. 27). Not till this moment, He would seem to say, has My soul ever been overshadowed by even the faintest cloud of trouble, but now that I must appear as a criminal, it is only fitting and right that it should be thus overshadowed and darkened ; and so indeed it was. Over that Divine soul swept the storm of four disturbing passions of weariness, fear, sadness, and languor : *He began to be heavy and to fear, and to be sorrowful and sad* (Matt. xxvi. 37 ; Mark xiv. 33).

Let us try to analyse or define these conditions of the soul, which oppressed the Saviour of the world as He passed along the way to the Garden of Agony. Weariness, or heaviness of spirit, makes life appear almost intolerable ; every moment of it is a burden of which we would fain rid ourselves. Fear shakes the soul to its very foundations, threatening it with a thousand

possible evils and disasters; sadness wraps it in a sombre cloud, the very shadow of death in its gloom and obscurity; and, last of all, languor overwhelms it with a strange faintness and failure of all its natural forces, which is almost like death itself. These, then, were the conditions which drew from the lips of our Divine Lord that sorrowful assertion, *Now is My soul troubled;* this is the beginning of the punishment which He bore for us. Yes, but the beginning only; and before entering further into the consideration of that terrible agony, we must, if we would realize its full intensity, at once and for ever disabuse our minds of that error (into which some of our minds fall) of imagining that the immovable constancy of the Son of God, supported by Divine power, prevented His soul from being violently agitated by those passions of which we have been speaking and which, seeing that He was not only perfect God but also perfect man, were incidental to His human nature.

Holy Scripture, when speaking of sorrow and suffering, makes use of a metaphor which throws some light upon this objection often erroneously advanced. The inspired writers compare sorrow to a troubled sea which cannot rest; and assuredly grief has its bitter waters which sometimes flood the stricken soul; it has its impetuous waves which threaten to overwhelm it, and often when we think it has grown calmer it is only a temporary lull before a fresh outburst of fury. The Prophet, indeed, actually makes use of this comparison, when speaking of the Passion of the Son of God: *Great,* he says, *is Thy sorrow as an ocean* (Lam. ii. 13).

Since, then, His sorrow is like a sea, it was assuredly in His power to restrain that sorrow, as we read in the Gospel that He restrained the fury of the tempest on

the Sea of Galilee. Then He quelled the wind and waters with a word, and *there was made a great calm* (Mark iv. 39). But at other times He exercised His Divine power in a yet more glorious and majestic manner ; giving rein to the tempests and suffering the winds to lash the waves into fury, while He, calm and serene in the dignity of His Godhead, walked upon the waters, treading the angry waves under His feet. Even so did Jesus in His Passion deal with sorrow. He might have commanded its waves and they would have been still ; He might with a single word have calmed the tempest which was troubling His soul, but it was not His will so to do. He, Who is the Eternal Wisdom and Who disposes and does all things at the appointed time, seeing that the hour of suffering had come, opened the flood-gates and let the torrent pour in upon His soul in full force. It is true that He walked upon the troubled sea calm and unmoved, but still it remained a troubled sea ; its swelling waves surged over His most sensitive spirit, weighing it down with heaviness, tossing it to and fro with fear, overwhelming it with sadness. Never for an instant imagine that the constancy which we adore in the Son of God, minimized one iota of His sufferings ; He did indeed surmount them all, but He none the less felt them all. He drained the chalice of His Passion to the very dregs, not leaving one single drop in its depths ; and not only did He drink the potion, but He did so slowly, tasting its full bitterness as drop by drop it wetted His sacred lips. Hence the heaviness, the fear, the dejection, the langour which so overwhelmed Him as to force from Him those words of lamentation spoken to His Apostles: *My soul is sorrowful, even unto death ; stay you here and watch with Me* (Matt. xxvi. 38).

Ah, we know too well what it was that thus oppressed and weighed down the soul of our Divine Saviour! It was the burden of our sins and of the sins of the whole world. Yes, putting aside all philosophic reasoning, all studied language and tricks of oratory, let us calmly and seriously fix our attention on the wonderful picture offered to our mental vision by the Prophet: *All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all* (Isa. liii. 6).

See this Divine Saviour on Whom suddenly are heaped the sins of the whole world, all the treacheries and perfidies, all the impurities and adulteries, all the impieties and sacrileges, all the curses and blasphemies, in a word, all the deadly horrors of which our depraved nature is capable. Ah! what a terrible accumulation, what a very avalanche of loathsomeness descending upon the spotless soul of Jesus! *The torrents of iniquity have troubled Me* (Ps. xvii. 5). Yes, they have indeed troubled Him. Prostrate even in the dust, groaning beneath this shameful burden, not even daring to look up to Heaven, so bowed down to the earth is that Sacred Head with the grevious weight of our sins which He has truly made His own.

Sinner, hardened in pride and obstinacy, look upon Jesus bowed down and prostrate in the dust because you lift your haughty head to the stars; see Him weighed down by the heavy burden of sin because you make so light of it and because you shake off the yoke of discipline; see Him in His Agony, and remember that because you take pleasure in sin He must endure that agony caused by sin. To understand this better, it would be well to remind ourselves that every sin involves shame and sorrow—shame because of undue

and unreasonable self-exaltation, and sorrow because of delight taken in what ought to have yielded no gratification. Jesus, All-holy and Divine, in taking our sins upon Himself must of necessity experience these emotions in their most vehement intensity; hence His Agony.

Shame first covers His sacred face, then bows Him down to the earth; but, what is more marvellous still, shame makes Him tremble before His Eternal Father. He no longer speaks to Him with the loving familiarity, the unwavering confidence of an only Son relying absolutely upon the unfailing goodness of His Father. *Father! if it be possible!* But is there anything that is impossible with God? Yes, Father, all things are possible to Thee, if it is Thy will that they should be done. *If Thou wilt;* and can it be that Thou shouldst not will what a Son so beloved asks of Thee? Listen to the actual words which then fall from those Divine lips: *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt* (Matt. xxvi. 39). O Jesus, Divine Lord and Master, can this be the language of a well-beloved Son? Only a little while ago Thou saidst with such calm confidence: *Father, all that is Mine is Thine, and Thine is Mine* (John xvii. 10); and at another time, beginning Thy prayer with an act of thanksgiving, Thou saidst: *Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I knew that thou hearest Me always* (John xi. 41–42). Why, dear Lord, dost Thou now speak so differently? Why do I now hear these sorrowful words: *Not My Will but Thine?* Since when has this opposition between the will of the Father and that of the Son begun to operate?

Ah! can you not see that the Divine Son is trembling

beneath the burden of the sins of men ? The shame of those offences with which He is laden, contends with that happy filial liberty which once was His. What sad constraint for the Son of God ! *And being in an agony He prayed the longer.* There was a time when a single short sentence was sufficient to carry all before it ; He had but to say : *Father, I will it* (John xvii. 24). There was a time when He could speak thus boldly ; but now that the personality of the Only-Begotten Son is veiled and cloaked by the sinner's garments, He no longer dares to use such freedom. He prays, but He prays with trembling ; and, praying a long time, He drinks in long deep draughts of the shame of a long refusal. Speak no more, Divine substitute for sinners ; nothing but death remains for Thee.

The second cause of the Agony of Jesus was sorrow for the sins with which He was laden ; a sorrow so deadly and so crushing that no human imagination can picture it. We, miserable and lethargic sinners as we are, do not and cannot feel the full bitterness of sin. If you would form some faint idea of it, see the flood of bitter tears which Peter shed for one single sin of unfaithfulness. But our Divine Lord, like the scape-goat sent out into the wilderness, bore on His sacred shoulders not only the sin of Peter, but also that of the traitor Judas, of the cowardly Pilate, nay, even of the furious rabble who became guilty of deicide as they cried out : *Let Him be crucified !* (Matt. xxvii. 23). O Jesus ! laden with the sins of the whole world, were Your tears as a limitless ocean, they could not be in just proportion to the measureless infinity of those sins.

Sorrow of heart now comes to swell this torrent of bitterness, and to make it truly incalculable. Jesus grieves for all our sins as though He had committed

them Himself, because in His Father's sight He is indeed laden with them all. There is not one of those sins that has not its own special and peculiar malice. He sorrows over them as much as they deserve to be sorrowed over ; because He must pay the price of all, and in that price sorrow has its part,—sorrow which must bring with it no sort of consolation, for consolation would have subtracted something from the amount of that debt which must be paid in full. And what a debt ! What an overwhelming burden ! David in his distress cried out : *My sins encompass me on every side, they are more in number than the hairs of my head, my heart has failed me* (Ps. xxxvii). Ah ! Sacred Heart of Jesus, weighed down by the multitude of our sins, what shall we say of Thee ? Divine Heart, sorrowful even unto death, how canst Thou find room even in Thy fathomless depths for the countless miseries which pierce and rack Thee ?

Yes, it is not for a moment to be doubted that the sorrows of Jesus were in themselves sufficiently poignant and numerous to have at any moment stopped the beating of that Sacred Heart. He Himself has told us : *My soul is sorrowful even unto death* (Matt. xxvi. 38) ; and in order to convince us more certainly of the fact, He gives a token, the marvellous sweat of blood pouring in crimson drops from head to foot as He prayed in the Garden of the Agony. I care not to try and find any natural cause for this sweat of blood. It was Divine, miraculous, supernatural, but the Son of God permitted it to occur in order to convince us that the suffering caused to Him by our sins was of itself sufficient to draw from His sacred veins such a torrent of blood as was copious enough to have exhausted all His physical forces and snapped asunder

those bonds which keep the soul imprisoned in the body. He would then assuredly have died in the throes of this supreme agony, had not Divine power sustained Him in it, reserving Him for future developments of that suffering which while death was still delayed reached its climax on the Cross of Calvary.

And what then was this agony, so infinitely different to any which ordinary mortals ever undergo? In their case the soul which clings to the body and would fain not to be separated from it, is torn from its poor fleshly tenement by violence; whereas the soul of our Divine Lord, on the very point of quitting its prison, ready to take flight as a caged bird when its door is set open, is restrained from so doing by Divine authority. In the dying the soul clings with passionate struggles and strivings to the flesh which it loves and cannot bear to abandon; death having already made itself master of the outworks of the citadel the soul retreats into its inner courts, and finally entrenches itself in the secret recesses of the poor palpitating heart; there for a while it holds its own, resisting, baffling, but only on the defence, till the enemy at last triumphs, and drives it from even that final refuge, dealing at the same time the death-blow. Not so with our Divine Saviour. When all the physical forces of His Sacred Humanity are disordered, enfeebled, almost annihilated by the outpouring of the Precious Blood in the Garden of the Agony, the soul, ready to take flight, is arrested, held captive, still detained in her prison house, by that supreme command which cannot be resisted or disobeyed. Ah! my beloved Jesus, sorrowful indeed even unto death, still live on a little longer, live on to bear the other torments which await Thee! The Jews with the traitor Judas at their head are

close at hand, there must be something left for them to do. It is enough, dear Lord, that Thou hast shown sinners that sin of itself would have had power sufficient to deprive Thee of life.

Sinner, would you have believed it possible that your sin could have had such tremendous, such fatal power? Had we only seen Jesus exhausted, fainting, dying in the hands of His executioners, we should always have believed that His death was the result of the tortures inflicted upon Him by those barbarians. But now, seeing Him prostrate, bleeding, agonized in the Garden of Olives, with nothing but the burden of our sins to overwhelm Him thus, with no other tormentors, no other tortures near Him, now, now indeed we know ourselves to be the Deicides, now we must weep and groan and beat our breasts, and tremble as accusing conscience brings this awful truth home to our hearts. And well indeed may we tremble, having within ourselves, deep down in the recesses of our own hearts, so certain a cause of death. Sin was sufficient in itself to bring about the death of a God; and how is it, then, that we poor mortals, having this poison always lurking in our vitals, yet live on? Ah! we only do so by a miracle. The same Divine power which miraculously retained the soul of the Saviour within the prison of His mortal body works a like marvel for ours, but with this difference: it preserves our life in order to spare us such torments, but in our Divine Lord it does this only that He may undergo fresh suffering, a new and keener agony, as we shall presently see.

It is written in the Book of Wisdom (Wis. v. 21) that all creatures shall rise up in arms to do battle with God against His enemies; and this is the second scourge

with which He threatens sinners. Our Divine substitute, holy, merciful, and loving, has already borne the first portion of the sentence, that of self-inflicted agony ; now He has reached the second stage of the vengeance of the Eternal Father, and almost all creatures are about to unite in subjecting the Victim to every kind of insult and torment. I do not of course mean that every individual creature was made an instrument in carrying out the terrible punishment inflicted upon Jesus Christ, because it was due to our sins which He had taken upon Himself. No, I am only putting before you the fact that our Divine Lord in His agony was abandoned to every sort of insult, outrage, torture that it would have been in the power of the vilest and most miserable living creature to inflict upon Him.

In order to gain a clear idea of this second part of the punishment which was a source of infinite pain, we must before all things remember one certain truth. Seeing it to be just that the sinner when separated from God (Who is his strength and his support) should fall into the utmost extremity of weakness, our Lord, as soon as He in His infinite mercy had put Himself in the place of all who ever had sinned, or ever would sin, voluntarily suspended and as it were withdrew into Himself the employment of His Divine power. This is why, when the Jews drew near to seize Him, He spoke these memorable words : *Are you come out against Me as a thief? When I was daily with you in the Temple you did not stretch out your hands against Me ; but this is your hour and the power of darkness* (Luke xxii. 52–53).

Speaking thus, He would have them understand that they had no power to arrest Him in the days when He taught and ministered and worked miracles among

them, because then He was exerting His own Divine power ; but that now, when that power was no longer asserting itself, the opposing forces that were brought to bear upon His Sacred Humanity by the hatred and malice of His enemies, had nothing to restrain, nothing to limit them. *Now is your hour and the power of darkness.* This marvellous suspension of the power of the Son of God did not restrict itself to the restraint and self-imposed truce to all His extraordinary and Divine power, it even included the suspension of some of His human and merely natural forces, as you shall see.

If a man finds himself unable to resist violence, he can sometimes save himself by flight ; if he cannot avoid being taken prisoner, he can at least defend himself when he is accused ; or if he is deprived of that liberty, he can always find some relief in his distress by vehement complaints of the injustice with which he is being treated, and by groans and lamentations over his sufferings. Not so in the case of our Divine Lord. Of His own will He put away all these powers ; in the Son of God they were all fettered, even His very tongue was tied. When they accuse Him, He answers not ; when they strike Him, He murmurs not, not even the faintest groan or sigh such as the weak and oppressed utter in the hope of stirring some pity in the hearts of their tormentors. *He opens not His mouth* (Isa. liii. 7). Nay more, He does not even turn away His head from the cruel blows which are rained upon it ; He remains motionless, not making an effort to elude one single blow.

What then is He doing in His Passion ? The Scriptures tell us in a few words : *He delivered Himself to him that judged Him unjustly* (1 Peter ii. 23) ; and what is here said of our Divine Lord's judge is to be

understood consequently as regards all who in those terrible hours took upon themselves the task of insulting and torturing Him. *He delivered Himself up.* Yes, He gives Himself up to them, that they may do what they will with Him. They wish to kiss Him, He gives them His sacred lips ; to bind Him, He holds out His hands to them ; to buffet Him, He turns His cheek to them ; to strike Him with their staves and to scourge Him, He offers His back and His shoulders to the cruel blows. They accuse Him before Caiphas and Pilate, He stands humbly before them as one convicted of guilt. Herod and all his court mock and deride Him, sending Him to and fro as a fool ; He is silent, seeming thus to own the justice of their accusations. They abandon Him to the mercy of the servants and the soldiers, and He even more absolutely abandons Himself to their pitiless outrages. That adorable Face, once so majestic and Divine that Heaven and earth were rapt in ecstasy as they beheld it, that Face Jesus Himself offers with calm unmoved dignity to the spittle of the vile rabble. They pluck out His hair, He says not a word ; as a sheep before its shearers the Son of God is dumb. The insolent soldiery press round Him, urging one another to fresh acts of cruelty. " He calls himself the King of the Jews," they cry out ; " then he must have a crown," and they put upon His sacred head a crown of thorns, driving in the thorns roughly with blows to make it fit more tightly ; He receives it all meekly. " See," they cry, " Herod has clothed him in white like a fool ; bring that old scarlet mantle and put it round his shoulders, so as to make a contrast of colours. Give us your hand, King of the Jews ; here is a reed for a sceptre, make what use of it you please."

Ah ! but it is no longer a jest. Now comes some-

thing real; the sentence of death is pronounced. Stretch forth Thy hands again; the nails are ready to fasten them to the Cross. Come, Jews and Romans, great and small, soldiers and citizens, rally your forces, heap blow upon blow, insult upon insult, wound upon wound, indignity upon indignity. Even when He hangs upon the Cross, make a mockery of His misery, ridicule Him as though He were a fool; wreak your fury upon Him as though He were a criminal; He delivers Himself up to you, He is ready to suffer all, all that your cruel malice, your inhuman ingenuity of mockery, may bring to bear upon Him.

Well, have you, Christians, considered this appalling picture, this terrible mass of sufferings, sufferings beyond thought or imagination, which I have brought together before your eyes; and has it no power to move you? Do I not see one tear? Do I not hear one sob? Are you waiting for me to detail to you more in particular the varied circumstances of this stupendous tragedy? Must I bring before you one by one all the actors who played their part on that stage of infamy? Judas, who gives Him the traitor's kiss; Peter, who denies Him; Malchus, who strikes Him; the false witnesses, who calumniate Him; the priests, who blaspheme His name; the judge, who acknowledges and yet condemns His innocence? Must I depict to you the Sacred Victim groaning under that hailstorm of blows and scourging, fainting under the burden of His Cross, under the pressure of the thorns that pierce His brow, under the tortures that the executioners inflict upon His whole body? But the day would close in before I had even got half through the frightful details. It is enough; let us pass on to serious meditation upon this tremendous subject.

Look upon that Face once so beautiful, now so marred, so piteous in its disfigurement. This is indeed a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. *Behold the man!* (John xix. 5), so Pilate speaks as he offers Him to the public gaze, to the public derision, on the heights of the Pretorium. But is this indeed a man? O Jesus! who could recognize Thee thus brought low, thus changed in form and feature by the cruel chastisement which our sins, our own sins, have inflicted upon Thee? Can this indeed be the Man promised to us from all eternity? the Man Whom the Prophet, speaking to God the Father, calls *the Man of Thy right hand?* Yes, there is no room here for doubt or questioning; this is of a truth the Man needed by us to atone for our iniquities; only a Man so disfigured in form and feature could restore in us the image of God which our sins had effaced; only this Man so covered with wounds could heal the deep wounds of our guilty souls: *He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed* (Isa. liii. 5).

O Sacred Wounds, I adore you! O Glorious Scars, I kiss you! O Precious Blood, flowing from the thorn-pierced brow, from the tortured eyes, from the mangled body, let me gather up drop by drop the healing, life-giving stream! Earth, do not drink up this Precious Blood! Job says: *O earth, cover thou not my blood* (Job xvi. 19). The blood of Job mattered not. But the Blood of Jesus, shed for a world's ransom! "Earth," again I say, "drink not this Blood of Jesus; every precious drop of it belongs to us, and must fall upon our sinful souls." I hear the frantic cry of the Jews: *His Blood be upon us and upon our children* (Matt. xxvii. 25). Yes, accursed race, it shall be, and it will

be ; your desire, your request, will only be too fully granted ; this Blood will be upon you, for your condemnation, to the end of time, till the Lord, wearying at last of His vengeance, may deign to take pity on your scattered remnant. Oh ! may the Blood of Jesus never be upon us in that way ! May it never cry for vengeance on our hard-heartedness, our obstinacy, our impenitence ! May it be upon us only for our sanctification and salvation ! Let me wash my soul in this most Precious Blood ! let me be dyed with it from head to foot ! let its deep crimson, like a robe, hide my sins from the eyes of a Just Judge, Divine, All-holy, in Whose sight the very heavens are not pure.

But not yet may we plunge into that healing bath ; the Blood of our Divine Redeemer must flow in still more copious streams. Come with me to the foot of the Cross ; there we can indeed plunge into a stream of His Blood, for that Precious Blood is there like a river overflowing its channel and soon to dry up its source ! Come to the Cross ; Jesus has carried it upon His shoulders, and now the executioners are about to fasten Him to it. It is here that my soul is stirred to its very depths, as I contemplate my Divine Saviour bearing on His own sacred shoulders the shameful instrument of His death. This, more than all the other indignities which we have seen heaped upon Him, overwhelms me with grief and indignant horror, because this it is which most strongly makes the Holy One, the Spotless Victim, appear in the guise of a sinner. To be fastened to the cross is to suffer the punishment of an ordinary criminal, but to carry that cross oneself is to make public confession that one deserves to die upon that tree of shame. Therefore it was that when this last indignity was added to the

malefactor's penalty, it was regarded as a sort of confession of the justice of his sentence and as a public avowal of his crime.

O Jesus ! innocent Jesus ! must Thou confess Thyself deserving of this extremest penalty ? Yes, so it must be. Men impute to our Divine Redeemer sins which He has indeed never committed ; but God has laid upon Him our iniquities, and now He is about to make for them that reparation which honour and justice demand, in the face of heaven and earth. As soon therefore as He beholds the Cross to which He is to be fastened, He salutes it thus : " Come, Cross of shame, that I may embrace you ! It is just and fitting that I should carry you, since it is My due. O holy Father, it is My due, not because of the sins which the Jews impute to Me, but because of those which Thou hast laid upon Me." Then gathering together all His failing forces, so that He may be able to carry this heavy Cross along the Way of Sorrows and up the Hill of Calvary, Jesus meekly takes it upon His shoulders, and in so doing takes upon Himself as it were afresh the sins of the whole world in order that He may pay their penalty upon that tree of shame.

Is there yet any crime left of which Jesus has not been accused ? If so, bring it now ; not a single one must be left out. Ah ! but it is all done ; the tremendous burden has been all heaped up, it is complete. Then let us all draw near, weeping, trembling, on our knees, and let each one of us acknowledge to his own guilty heart his own individual share in that awful piled-up burden under which Jesus Christ is bending. Alas ! it is our disobedience, our sins, our ingratitude that weigh Him down ! Alas ! and wretched man that I am, my sins increase His load ! My sins and yours,

all, all are adding to its weight. But let us not forget that the sins which make the burden almost insupportable to our Divine Saviour are those for which we have never done penance.

In this great Sacrifice it was essential that all should be Divine. It was essential that a satisfaction worthy of God should be offered, and that a God should Himself offer it ; that vengeance worthy of God should be executed, and again that God Himself should execute it.

Our Divine Lord is fastened to the shameful Tree, and the cruel nails are piercing His sacred hands and feet ; there is nothing to support the weight of His mangled and dislocated body but those hands already so terribly wounded by the nails, and now that weight is dragging the wounds open, wider and deeper. Loss of blood and anguish of spirit has parched His sacred tongue and dried up His very vitals, yet only vinegar and gall are offered to Him to quench that consuming thirst. In the midst of those unspeakable torments He sees round about the Cross and stretching into the far distance a vast crowd of spectators mocking His anguish, wagging their heads, cursing and deriding. On either side of Him are crucified two thieves ; one of whom, frantic with despair, dies blaspheming Him. Ah ! but all that agony which we have been trying to realize and to lay to heart, was but a preliminary to that supremest suffering which this Divine Victim, this Scapegoat for all sinners, was to endure upon the Cross, and which must needs come to Him from a power greater than that of any mere creature. Indeed, it belongs to God alone to avenge insults offered to Himself ; and as long as He takes no part in the punishment inflicted upon a sinner, that punishment

is, comparatively speaking, but a light one. To Him alone it belongs to execute upon sinners that sentence which is their due, and His arm alone is mighty enough to deal with them according to their deserts. *Vengeance is Mine, I will repay* (Rom. xii. 19), says the Eternal God; and therefore it was that having laid upon His own Beloved Son all our sins, He must needs launch upon His devoted head all the thunderbolts of His wrath, the righteous vengeance due to those sins. Not content with delivering Him up to the will of His enemies, the Eternal Father Himself *was pleased to bruise Him in His infirmity* (Isa. liii. 10). It was the *will* and *pleasure* of the Most High thus to bruise Him, it was a punishment planned in the Divine counsels from all Eternity. Can men or angels conceive anything more terrible?

St. Paul gives us some idea, and an appalling one, of the nature of this punishment. Putting before us on the one hand all the tremendous curses which the Law of God justly pronounces upon sinners, and, on the other, showing to the eye of faith Jesus Christ crucified in their stead, Jesus Christ become sin for us, St. Paul does not hesitate to tell us that *Jesus Christ was made a curse for us* (Gal. iii. 13). For it is written in the Law, and the declaration comes from God Himself, that *he is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree* (Deut. xxi. 23). And St. Paul tells us that this saying was prophetic and related principally to the Son of God, to Whom, as being the end of the Law, he does not hesitate to apply it. Here, then, behold Him accursed of God! Should we have dared to say this, nay, even to think it, had not the Holy Ghost Himself taught us to believe it? Since, then, the doctrine comes to us from so Divine a source, let us try to

understand it as far as our limited faculties will permit.

I learn from the teaching of Holy Scripture that God's curse upon sinners, in the first place, wraps them about and clings to them like a noisome raiment : *He put on cursing like a garment* (Ps. cviii. 18) ; then that it penetrates deeper and deeper into their very being and substance : *entering like water into his entrails and like oil into his bones* (Ps. cviii). O Jesus Christ my Saviour ! can it be that Thou art reduced to such a state as this ? Yes, so it is ; for the curse of God has encompassed Him without and within. His Eternal Father Who hitherto, throughout the course of that Divine Son's life upon earth, had delighted in giving Him proofs of His love, leaves Him helpless, without any token of protecting tenderness ; it is as though He said to His enemies : *Do with Him what you will, I abandon Him.* O Eternal Father ! but this is the moment when most of all He needs Thy succour ; listen to His appeal : *Do Thou deliver Me, for I am poor and needy, and My heart is troubled within Me* (Ps. cviii. 22). The Jews are crying out to Him that if He will come down from the Cross they will believe in Him (Matt. xxvii. 42). Now surely is the moment when the heavens should open, now is the time when from out their glorious heights a Voice Divine should thrill our hearts with the proclamation, *This is My Beloved Son !* (Matt. xvii. 5). But no, the heavens are as brass above Him ; no miracle attests the hidden Divinity of this adorable Victim ; on the contrary, so absolutely is the protection of God the Father withdrawn from Him, that the very devils, conscious of this abandonment so awful and complete, come trooping round the Cross, that they may make Jesus the

sport of their malice and their fury. For we read in the holy Gospels that when the devils had finished their temptation in the wilderness, they *departed from Him for a time* (Luke iv. 13), or *until another time;* and this *other time* the Fathers interpret to be the time of His Passion, which was indeed *their* time. What then must have been the fury of their malice now in this hour which belonged to the powers of darkness; since even in the wilderness, at a time when opposing forces controlled their efforts, they yet were able to stir the soul of the sinless One so terribly?

But the curse of God reaches further than any mere attack from without; it penetrates into the very depths of the soul, and strikes at the root of our Divine Lord's physical and mental powers. The Scriptures tell us that God has a countenance for the just and a countenance for sinners. The countenance which He has for the just is tranquil and serene, dispelling all clouds and shadows, calming the troubles of conscience and filling it with holy joy (Ps. xxi.). My Crucified Jesus! once, yes, once in the days that are past, this countenance in all its radiant beauty was turned upon Thee, but now all is changed. Now the countenance which God turns upon sinners, that countenance of which it is written that *it is against them that do evil* (Ps. xxxiii. 17), is turned upon Thee, and it is the countenance of justice. God shows to His beloved Son this countenance, He turns upon Him a glance not of that gentle serenity which calms the troubled spirit, but rather of that wrath so dreadful that, like a flaming fire at which coals are kindled, it strikes terror into every guilty conscience. Yes, He looks upon His Divine Son as a sinner, and goes forth to meet Him as a Judge confronting a criminal. "O My God!" Jesus exclaims,

" why dost Thou so deal with Me ? Why is Thy love and tender pity no longer shielding Me ? Why art Thou now so far from Me ? *O My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?* " (Matt. xxvii. 46).

The curse of God has pierced even into the inmost recesses of the soul of Jesus, whither it alone can penetrate. The passage leading into that torture-chamber is closed and sealed against the most violent assaults of creatures ; God only Who made it can enter in there, He reserves that privilege to Himself. In one moment also, when it pleases Him so to do, He can, in the words of Scripture, *shake it from the foundations* (Wisdom iv. 19), bringing upon this troubled soul utter destruction because of its sins. As Isaias tells us, *The Lord will destroy the wicked and the sinners* (Isa. i. 28). And in order to perfect the sacrifice which the Divine Jesus owed to Divine Justice, it was necessary that this last, this supremest blow should be dealt Him ; this is what the Prophet means us to understand when he says : *The Lord was pleased to bruise Him in infirmity* (Isa. liii. 10). Ah ! there is no need that you should wait for me to bring before your mind's eye this last and most awful scene in the great Tragedy of the Passion. It is enough for you to think how intense must have been the agony of oppression which weighed down the soul of the Son of God when it could wring from Him the bitter cry : *My God ! My God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me ?* Nothing but the temporary withdrawal within itself of the Divinity of Jesus Christ could have made possible such a cry as that, such agony as that ; or it might be that the power of Almighty God, which extends even *to the division of the soul from the spirit* (Heb. iv. 12), may have caused the presence of that Divinity to be felt in one portion only

of the soul of our crucified Lord, all the rest of that soul being abandoned to the operation of Divine vengeance ; or else by some other secret agency beyond our ken, or by a miracle (for all is extraordinary in Jesus Christ), His Divinity may have found some means of bringing the closest union of God and Man in Him into accord with the utter desolation into which the Man Jesus Christ was plunged by the redoubled and multiplied blows of Divine vengeance. How this was effected it is not for us to ask of one another. This only is certain, that nothing but the strength of an unfathomable agony could have wrung from the Sacred Heart that piteous, that marvellous cry : *My God ! My God ! why hast Thou forsaken Me !* It must remain a mystery.

Throughout the terrible period of this abandonment, the Eternal Father was effecting in Jesus Christ the reconciliation of the whole world, making no more an imputation of sin to that world, lying though it was in wickedness. At the very moment in which He rejected His Divine Son, He opened to us men His arms ; looking upon that Son with wrath and condemnation, He turned upon us sinners a glance full of pity and tenderness. To us He was indeed *Father ;* to Jesus He was *the God Who had forsaken Him.* The wrath of the Eternal Father, descending like a thunder-cloud upon the head of the Innocent Son, discharged itself there and passed away. That was what took place upon the Cross ; and the Son of God, reading then at last in the eyes of His Father that His wrath was now wholly appeased, saw that the moment had come for Him to quit this poor world which He had redeemed by His most precious Blood.

And here I might paint for you a picture of the dying

Jesus, in this closing scene of His Passion, each moment growing weaker and weaker, gasping for breath, each fainting sigh deeper and more long drawn than the last, till the soul departs, leaving the body cold, rigid, lifeless. Such a picture might indeed stir your emotions, but we must not draw upon our imaginations to depict what is unreal and untrue. The Death of our Divine Lord was not like that. In its every detail it was carefully modelled upon the plan laid down in prophecy. When Jesus saw that at last the measure of His sufferings was filled up, and that God the Father was appeased, He knew that nothing but His Death was needed to disarm Justice. Therefore, commending His soul to God, He cried aloud, with a voice so mighty and so thrilling that it struck terror into the hearts of the multitude: *It is consummated!* (John xix. 30). Then freely and willingly He rendered up His soul to His Father, in order to fulfil His own declaration that *no one took His life away from Him, but that He gave it up of Himself* (John x. 18), and also to make us understand that truly He lived only for us, and that since our peace was made with God He did not wish to remain one moment longer upon earth.

Thus the Divine Jesus died, showing us how true it is that *having loved His own He loved them unto the end* (John xiii. 1). Thus the Divine Jesus died, *making peace by His sufferings between Heaven and Earth* (Col. i. 20). He died! He died!—and His last sigh was a sigh of love for men.

V

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

By Bossuet

"The just perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart" (Is. lvii. 1).

In the Cross is comprised the whole science of the Christian; and the great Apostle St. Paul, after having learnt in the third Heaven the secrets of the wisdom of God, proclaimed to the world that he knew nothing but Jesus Christ, nothing but Jesus Christ crucified: *I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ and Him crucified* (1 Cor. ii. 2).

It is in fact most true that never has Divine Wisdom revealed itself more clearly (to those to whom faith has given eyes to see) than in the Mystery of the Cross. There it is that Jesus Christ, with outstretched, nail-pierced hands, opens that blood-stained book from whose pages we may learn the whole order of the counsels of God, the whole economy of the salvation of men, the fixed unvarying rule which should form all our judgments, the sure infallible guide which is to shape our lives and direct our course aright, finally, the mysterious epitome of the whole doctrine of the Gospel and of Christian theology. It is not, then, without reason that the prophet Isaias complains in my text that this Death is not pondered and made

the subject of our most serious meditation. *The Just perisheth,* he tells us, *and no man layeth it to heart.*

In vain does Holy Church call all her children, on this day of our Divine Lord's Crucifixion, to prostrate themselves before the Cross on which He suffered and died for them. All do indeed venerate that Cross, but few if any apply its virtue to their own souls, while contemplating this amazing mystery. Hence it is that the most sacred of all spectacles, and the one most capable of touching the heart, has not power to change ours.

Ah ! how shall I succeed in riveting your attention to the Cross of Jesus Christ, so that I may be able to engrave deeply upon your hearts an undying remembrance of His Passion, and reveal to you the secrets enshrined in it for your salvation ? But remember, no one can possibly understand the mystery of the Cross unless he first adores it ; and if we would penetrate its greatness, we must revere its lowliness.

Then, Cross of our Divine Saviour, displaying to us the greatest of all miracles in the greatest of all scandals ; O holy Cross, the torture of the just and the shelter of the guilty, the work of unrighteousness and the altar of sanctity ; which deprives us of Jesus Christ and yet gives Him to us ; which makes Him at once our Victim and our Monarch, containing in the mystery of the same inscription the cause of His Death and the title of His Royalty ! receive our adoration ; and make us sharers in thy graces and illuminations. To thee, O Cross of Jesus, I render that devout veneration which the Church teaches us to render ; and for the love of Him Whose Agony honours thee, Whose Blood

consecrates thee, Whose reproaches make thee worthy of worship through all the days of Eternity, I cry to thee, with that same Church: *Hail! holy Cross!*

When we consider all the unmerited persecution which was heaped upon the Saviour of souls, it is not difficult to see that the guilt lies at our own door. For as faith teaches us that He was *delivered up for our sins* (Rom. iv. 25), we may well understand (says the devout St. Bernard) that we are the authors of His Death, far more than Judas who betrayed Him, than Pilate who condemned Him, than the soldiers who crucified Him. But it is from quite a different point of view that I intend to consider our guilty share in the Passion of our Saviour. I want to show you the various dispositions of those who, although so different from one another, yet were unanimous in one thing, the persecution of the Innocent; and in those varied dispositions I want you to observe the inclinations and the ways of men, so that each of you may recognize the evil which he carries about with him, hidden in his own heart. In order to do this we must go back to the beginning of things and notice that it was one of the counsels of God that Jesus Christ, Who was predestined to die *for* sin, should also die through the very agency of that same sin itself. I mean that since He was the victim and *the propitiation for the sins of the whole world* (1 John ii. 2), so too it was that almost every sin took a part in His agony and death. This is why we see envy, cruelty, derision, blasphemy, treachery, false witness, and perfidy banded together to carry to the end their infamous design, so that the Divine Victim had to experience all that the heart of man, in

its rage, its wickedness, its utmost malignity, can conceive.

If you ask me what could be the cause of this mysterious counsel of the Eternal Father, and why such a concourse of sins should have been summoned to wreak vengeance upon His Divine Son, this is my answer. The Son of God was given to us not only to atone for the sin and wickedness of the whole world, but to make that sin and wickedness hated and abhorred. There is in the creature a fathomless depth of malignity which makes St. John the Apostle say not only that the world is wicked, but that it is nothing but wickedness : *The whole world is seated in wickedness* (1 John v. 19). For two reasons this malignity armed itself against Jesus Christ with full purpose to do its very worst. In the first place, because the Divine Conqueror having come down upon earth to do battle with the wickedness of the world, it was necessary that He should make that wickedness declare itself not partially but wholly, so that all men might see and understand the eternal opposition which exists between Himself and that sinful world ; the world therefore marched forth to meet Him in full order of battle, bringing to bear upon Him all those deadliest engines of war which its malice had devised. In the second place, our Saviour came to expiate our sins, to give us the means of knowing them, and motives for hating them. Now nothing could make us hate the wickedness of the world more than to see it pouring forth upon that Divine Saviour all its accumulated venom. Therefore it was necessary that the most hidden, the most secret depths of men's malice should be dragged into the light ; so that that malice might be made all the more worthy of our execration, by our realizing its

part in the vilest, the most hideous tragedy ever played on the stage of this universe. Thus the most useful way of considering the sufferings inflicted upon the Saviour of souls is to ponder thoughtfully and weigh carefully the tendencies and capabilities of evil in the heart of man, so that as often as we recognize in ourselves some resemblance, however faint, to those who thus persecuted and afflicted Jesus Christ, we may feel and know in how many ways we are, so to speak, committing over again the crime of the Jews, and renewing the Passion of our Blessed Saviour.

Come, then, and learn from the history of His sufferings what may be expected from the world : come and learn to know the temperament and all the evil inclinations of the human mind : come and see all that has to be endured from the friendship, the hatred, the indifference of men ; from their favour, from their neglect, from their virtues and from their vices, from their probity and from their injustice. All these things change, all these things fail us, all of them can turn into affliction ; and of this Jesus Christ is for us an illustrious example.

Yes, all of them turn into a cross. And, first and foremost, this is the case with those who call themselves our friends. Either they draw away from us from motives of self-interest, or they undo us by their treachery, or they give us up from weakness and fickleness, or they offer us their help at the wrong moment, just when it suits them to give it, not when we are needing it, and always they are a burden to us.

The traitor Judas is a terrible instance of the malignity of self-interest severing the bonds of the holiest friendship. Jesus had called him into the sacred band

of His Apostles, Jesus had honoured him with His special confidence and had made him His treasurer and almoner ; and yet, oh, infinite malice of the human heart ! it was neither an enemy nor a stranger, but it was this same Judas, this dear disciple, this intimate and chosen friend, who betrayed the Divine Master, who delivered Him into the hands of His foes ; who first robbed Him and then sold Him for a paltry gain : so feeble are friendship, trust, reliability, when they run counter to our self-interest. Do not say to me : "But I shall choose my friends wisely." Nay, who could choose them better than Jesus ? Do not say, "But I shall live in peace and harmony with my friends." Why, who could treat his friends with more loving courtesy, more gentle consideration, than Jesus Who was kindness and sweetness itself ? No ; let us rather loathe and dread the sin of avarice which made even of an Apostle first a thief and finally a traitor ; and let us tremble when we perceive in ourselves the slightest sign of the entrance of self-interest into our own heart, fearing lest it should in the end take up its abode there.

Self-interest always makes flatterers, and therefore it was that Judas, being wholly possessed by this demon of self-love, abandoned himself to the guidance of that other demon, flattery. He salutes Jesus and betrays Him ; he calls Him Master and sells Him ; he kisses Him and delivers Him up to His enemies. This is the very picture of a flatterer, who in season and out of season praises and applauds the man whom he calls his master and patron, only that he may get the better of him in a thousand ways, as the Apostle St. Peter tells us : *Through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you* (2 Peter ii. 3). All their

praises are but snares, all their courtesies are traps and pitfalls. They make secret compacts which affect us though we do not know it ; like Judas they say : *What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you* (Matt. xxvi. 15). Thus, generally speaking, they sell us, and not unfrequently deliver us up. Let us, then, mistrust the praises and courtesies of men. Look narrowly into the motives of the flatterer who heaps praises and adulation upon you ; he is only using this as a cloak to disguise his treachery. He will decry you behind your back, and even perhaps betray you when you are most unsuspecting, most ready to confide in him. Ah ! who would not hate flattery, with its corrupting influences, its treacherous caresses, its poisoned kiss ? Who would not hate it with an undying hatred, since it delivered up the Divine Saviour into the hands of His implacable enemies ?

But having seen what false friends are, let us consider what is to be expected from those who seem to be the most reliable. Weakness, misunderstanding, help given in promise only, in reality nothing but neglect and abandonment ; that is what the Divine Jesus experienced. No sooner had He been taken captive by His enemies than all His disciples forsook Him and fled (Mark xiv. 50). Alas ! do none of you who read these words recognise yourselves among the number of those scared and guilty deserters ? Even as regards our earthly friendships, how frail and feeble they are ! how inconstant, how unreliable ! When trouble comes, when difficulties arise, this so-called friendship instantly takes the alarm ; it cannot stand the shock of adverse circumstances, and though for a time it may keep up the farce of an outward show of friendliness, there is no reality in it, such a travesty is

it of that dignified and sacred thing which we call friendship. When its help is most needed it is always at its weakest, for one of the peculiarities of an absolutely worldly and untrue friend is that his willingness to assist depends entirely on his own humours, not on our need.

We see Peter starting forward indeed to defend his Master, laying an eager hand upon his sword, and by bloodshed avenging that Holy One Who needed no defence but that of His own innocence. O Peter, do you wish to relieve the anguish of your Divine Master ? you can do so by gentleness, by submission, by your own persevering fidelity. You do not bring Him this relief, because it is foreign to your own impetuous temper ; you abandon yourself to the blind transports of an ill-judged zeal ; you strike the ministers of justice and thus excite fresh suspicions against that innocent Master Who has already been treated as a seditious person. This is what the friendship of the world does ; it only cares to satisfy itself and to give us such help as suits its own humour, while it denies us that which our necessities demand.

But if I am not mistaken, the last blow which a tottering friendship can deal us is a great show of ill-sustained zeal, a feeble little spark of constancy which dies out suddenly before it has shot up into a flame, and leaves us more oppressed by the darkness than if it had never glimmered at all. Peter is himself an example of this. How steadfast he is at first ! how dauntless ! he is ready to die for his Master ; though the whole world should abandon that Master, *he* could never forsake Him. Yes, at first he follows Him ; but, alas ! what short-lived fidelity, to end in a denial so cruel, a treachery so base, that it could only wound the Sacred

Heart the more grievously in its contrast to so fair a beginning. Ah ! how deceitful is the friendship of the creature in its appearances, how corrupt in its flattery, how bitter in its changeableness, how overwhelming in its ill-timed, fitfully-given benefits, and in those first shows of constancy which only serve to make defection and neglect more insupportable ! All those miseries our Divine Master suffered, to make us hate the sins which the so-called friendship of the world has, in our blind desire to propitiate it, led us to commit. Let us hate those sins, and banish from our hearts and lives any friendship which has not God for its motive, and charity for its guiding principle.[1] I say, all these miseries our Divine Master suffered. Yes, torments innumerable, a thousand griefs and pains, calumnies and insults that no tongue can express. But before dwelling upon these indignities, individually or collectively, let us consider what was the cause of them. It was envy, the basest, the most hateful, the most despicable of all the passions, but yet perhaps the most common, and the one from which but few souls are entirely free. Learn to hate it and to root up its last fibres from your heart, seeing that it both planned and executed all that was set on foot to bring about the seizure, the torture, the Crucifixion of the Holy One of God. Men pride themselves on their delicate sensitiveness, and our self-love flatters us so inordinately, makes us so great in our own eyes, that the very smallest appearance of contradiction, the slightest wound given

[1] " The truth is, and to express it in the words of St. Augustine, men can never love one another with true love unless they love God· But he who loves God will love his neighbour as himself."—H. KENELM DIGBY.

" That the neighbour may be loved with perfect righteousness it is necessary that God should be in our thoughts."—ST. BERNARD.

to that self-love, seems to us an injury to be resented with angry indignation.

But what is perhaps the most inexcusable and the most unreasonable thing in us is that on account of our extraordinary sensitiveness we are actually irritated by those who have done us no wrong, wounded without being even touched by them. One of our friends makes a large fortune quite honourably, and his success at once turns us into an enemy ; or we take umbrage at his very excellence and high reputation. The Scribes and Pharisees hated Jesus Christ ; they could not endure either the innocent simplicity of His life and behaviour or the purity of His teaching, all of which put to shame their hypocrisy, their pride, and their avarice. "Oh! envy!" says St. Gregory of Nazianzen, "you are at once the most just and the most unjust of all the passions : unjust assuredly, because you afflict the innocent ; but at the same time just, because you punish the guilty : unjust, because you disturb and disorder the whole human race ; but most supremely just in that you begin your deadly operations in the very heart in which you first took form and substance." The Priests and Pharisees, who were continually a prey to this base passion, let it loose upon the Divine Saviour; in their envy and hatred they inflicted upon Him all the anguish that contempt, derision, and cruelty could suggest.

It is, we may say, almost an unheard-of thing that derision should be joined to cruelty, especially in so aggravated a form ; because there is a certain horror attached to the shedding of blood, an environment of gloomy and dismal images which makes any display of levity, any malignant mockery, almost impossible even to the most hardened soul. And yet I see my Divine

Redeemer delivered up to His enemies, to be mocked and derided as a fool, scourged and crucified as a malefactor ; proving thus the possibility of what might seem impossible, namely, that envy and malice can add to the tortures which they are inflicting a display of savage joy and brutal hilarity which increases a thousandfold all that their victim is called upon to suffer at their hands.

St. Augustine, when speaking of the Death of our Divine Lord, says : " Jesus Christ was delivered up to death by three distinctly different persons : by His Eternal Father, by His enemies, and by Himself." He was delivered up by the Eternal Father ; which makes St. Paul say that God *spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all* (Rom. viii. 32). He was delivered up by His enemies ; Judas delivered Him to the Jews : *I will deliver Him unto you* (Matt. xxvi. 15) ; the Jews delivered Him to Pilate : *they delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the Governor* (Matt. xxvii. 2) ; Pilate delivered Him to the soldiers to be crucified : *he delivered Him to the soldiers to be crucified* (Matt. xxvii. 26), And to come to the third point to which St. Augustine calls our attention, Jesus Christ was also delivered up by Himself ; and St. Paul, stirred to the very depths of his soul by this circumstance, writes of it to the Galatians thus : *I live in the faith o the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me* (Gal. ii. 20). So then we see the Son of God delivered up to death by three different persons, each of whom was actuated by a wholly different motive. The Eternal Father delivered Him up from a sense of justice, Judas from a motive of self-interest, the Jews from an instinct

of the bitterest envy, Pilate from cowardice, lastly, the Divine Victim offered Himself from obedience.

But, in order to understand the full extent of our dear Lord's obedience, we must remember that having submitted to the Will of His Father, and also to all that His most bitter enemies in their depraved and cruel wills forced upon Him, and having even voluntarily laid upon His own shoulders the weight of the whole world's iniquities, the Justice of the Divine Father willed that those iniquities should be avenged in the person of the Divine Son. Thus no sooner had the hour come when all the penalties of the guilty were to be transferred to that innocent and adorable Victim, than the Eternal Father brought to pass two amazing things : He let loose upon His Son all the powers of Hell, and at the same moment withdrew from Him all the protection of Heaven. Hitherto the enemies of Jesus had never succeeded in their attempts against Him. They had tried to stone Him, they had tried to take Him prisoner, but all in vain ; until the signal was given from on high, they were powerless. But now, at last, Almighty God having loosened the grasp of His detaining hand, all the passions of men burst from restraint, all the furies of Hell are unchained, all the powers of evil can do their worst against the Son of God. Yes, but only because He is willing that it should be so. Had He offered the slightest resistance, all these efforts would have been in vain, and the fury of His enemies as impotent as before. He offers none. He sees that His hour is come, He adores the decree of His Father ; and being steadfastly resolved to obey that decree, He permits to the malice of the Jews an almost unbounded power over His sacred person ; so that while His enemies put no restraint to their daring

cruelty, He yields voluntarily to the necessity of the very extremity of endurance and suffering. Thus it is that in a way those enemies become all-powerful against the Almighty Himself, Who offers an unresisting front to all who would outrage Him.

St. Peter puts this before us very clearly when, having desired us to contemplate Jesus Christ in His Passion, he says : *Who when He was reviled did not revile, when He suffered He threatened not,* but rather *He submitted Himself to him who judged Him unjustly* (1 Peter ii. 23). For what is said of His judge may also be said of all those who insulted and oppressed Him : He delivered Himself up to them wholly and absolutely, that they might do with Him according to their will. This is why He does not refuse His Divine lips to the perfidious kiss of Judas ; why He voluntarily offers His innocent shoulders to the scourge ; His blessed hands, which have worked so many miracles, to the cords which bound them and to the cruel nails which pierced them ; this is why He presents that holy face, once so full of majesty, to all the insults which a furious mob can devise. Yes, we are expressly told by the Prophet Isaias that He did not even turn away His face : *I have not turned away My face from them that rebuked Me and spat upon Me* (Isa. l. 6). A willing Victim, meekly welcoming the very extremity of craft and cruelty, He bows His sacred head to blows and buffeting, instead of eluding their violence by a single gesture. Come then, Jews and Romans, magistrates and citizens, soldiers and civilians, come and do your worst. Heap up to overflowing the measure of your outrages, wound upon wound, railing upon railing, insult upon insult ; my Saviour makes no resistance, He sees in your rage and fury only the ful-

filment of His Father's decree, to which He bows reverently.

If any among you should one day fall into the hands of enemies, if their slanders should rob you of your fair name, if their schemes and artifices should seem to hedge you in with difficulties on all sides, if it should be impossible for you to make a stand against their attacks, backed as they may be by influence and credit and strength of position ; if (I say) you should ever be in such a case, remember Him Whom you are contemplating to-day, remember the Holy One, the Just, the spotless Lamb of God, bowed to the dust, crushed by the malice of envy and hatred. I know very well that this is the hardest trial of patience. It is easier to bear any evils than those in which our fellow-man has a part ; when the malignant hatred of an enemy is the cause of our misfortunes, then it is a hard matter to suffer patiently. For in diseases and natural infirmities we can see more clearly the ordering of God's Providence to which, rebellious though our will may be inclined to be, we know that we must submit ; but this Divine ordering is hidden from us when our troubles come through the agency of men's malice. When we are circumvented and hemmed in on all sides by their fraud, their injustice, their treachery ; when (in the words of the Psalmist) *they have compassed us about with words of hatred, and have fought against us without cause* (Ps. cviii. 2) ; when every avenue of escape seems closed against us by their cunning, and whichever way we turn their malice has been beforehand with us and devised some fresh snare and pitfall, then, I say, in such cases as this it is difficult in the face of so much injustice to recognize the ordering of a just God. Then therefore it is that our hearts rebel and

think themselves justified in so doing ; then it is that seeing only the malice of men oppressing and betraying us, we feel ourselves driven to the utmost excess of insubordination and revolt.

O Jesus, crucified by sinners ! O just and holy One, outraged and persecuted by a guilty world ! come to our aid in this our extremity ; and make us see, in all the evils which befall us through the malice of men, the ordering of God. In truth, has anything in the world's history ever happened by a more manifest ordering of the Providence of God than the Passion of His Son ? and what event has ever taken place in which malice, perfidy, and all other human crimes have had a larger share ? This, we may surely believe, was the cause of that mysterious struggle between the will of the Divine Victim and the just decree of His Eternal Father. Listen to His agonized cry in the Garden of Olives : *My Father ! let this cup pass from Me* (Matt. xxvi. 39). It is true indeed that, being like unto us in His human nature, He shrank with a natural horror from suffering and death, but yet I confidently assert that it was something more powerful than this which forced from His Divine lips so agonized a prayer. He saw in the chalice of His Passion not only the most intense suffering, but also the added bitterness of injustice beyond thought or imagination. This it was from which His holy soul shrank with the deepest horror ; the keenest agony of every wound was the sense of the sacrilege committed by those who inflicted it. " O My Father," we seem to hear the Divine Victim cry, " it is not thus that I would take upon Me the sins of My people ; I do not refuse to suffer, but if only this agony might not be brought about by the crimes of My enemies it would then be endurable. Must I drink

from this chalice not only the bitter draught of pain and ignominy, but must so full a measure of loathsome sins be mingled with it? O Father, if it be possible, spare Me this added bitterness." *But yet,* the Divine Sufferer adds, *not My Will but Thine be done* (Luke xxii. 42). What, then? Can it be that in the treachery of Judas, in the fury of the chief priests, in all the terrible details which go to make up the awful drama of the Passion and Crucifixion, the Will of the Eternal Father is working slowly but surely?

And here we must understand, with the great St. Augustine, that God presides even over the councils of the wicked; restraining them, urging them on, relaxing at one moment His hold upon them, at another, leading them captives subdued and conquered, making their most evil intentions serve His hidden ends. Were this not so, God the All-powerful and All-holy would not permit the existence of so many sins. He rules the darkness as well as the light; that is to say, He makes the schemes of the wicked, no less than the actions of the good, further the hidden designs of His Providence; and however frantically sinners may struggle to escape from Him, they are certain in the end only to find themselves unwittingly helping on the work ordered and planned by His Divine providence and wisdom.

Do your worst, then, spirits of evil; throng round the faithful soul; distress it, torment it, sharpen your venomous tongues, give full vent to your malignant humours: it matters not, that soul will possess itself in peace, because although you can plan and attempt much, you can do nothing but what God wills. You let loose your poisoned darts, but they do not always reach the point at which you aimed; and God, when it

pleases Him, will know well, not only how to turn them aside, but even how to pierce your own heart with them. Let not the malice of men then trouble us; Jesus, persecuted and obedient, reveals to us in their worst assaults the ordering of His Divine Father.

Only let us beware lest by our impatience we add bitterness to our sufferings, and by our murmurs we anger God. Whatever should befall us, let us keep the straight road; even if our enemies get the better of us, if honesty and integrity do not seem to prosper, and if crooked ways are more than a match for simplicity and fair dealing, do not let us, because of this, lose our confidence. Let us never for a moment believe that any mortal hand will have power to crush us; let us look beyond and above these merely human agencies, to that Supreme Court from whence the great decree issued, and let us say to our enemies, as the Divine Saviour said to Pilate: *You could not have any power against me, unless it were given you from above* (John xix. 11).

This it is which ought to extinguish in our hearts every spark of revenge; for the malice of our enemies, detestable as it is, is but an instrument employed by the hand of God to discipline or to chastise us. This thought must of necessity disarm our wrath; and daring and presumptuous indeed would that man be who, while recognizing the hand of God and the decree of a Sovereign Power in what afflicts and oppresses him, should yet think of revenge rather than of humble submission. Do not let us, then, consider so much what men have done to harm us, but let us rather consider Who it is *Who gives them power to hurt us* (Apoc. vii. 2); then our resentment will not venture to display itself; higher and nobler thoughts will occupy our minds;

and out of reverence for the decree of God, we shall be ready not only to suffer but also to forgive. Jesus Christ Crucified has set us this example.

We have seen all the malignant fury of the creature openly exerted against Him ; we have seen the just, the all-holy Son of God forsaken, denied, persecuted alike by friends and foes, even by those who being in authority were bound to protect His innocence, suffering at once from the weakness and pusillanimity of the one and from the obstinate, unflinching cruelty of the other ; and yet to all these outrages He opposes nothing but a free pardon which He grants to all and demands for all from His Father : *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke xxiii. 30). You see that not content with forgiving them, His Divine goodness makes excuses for them ; He pities their ignorance more than He blames their malice ; and being unable to excuse that malice itself, He offers for its expiation that death to which they are condemning Him, and redeems them (as St. Augustine says) with the Precious Blood which they are shedding.

With such a display of mercy, so measureless, so surpassing all human imagination, before our eyes to-day as we worship and adore our crucified Redeemer, can our hearts be so hard as not to desire to excuse all that weakness has made us suffer, and to forgive from the very bottom of our hearts all that malice has inflicted upon us ? And truly those who hate and persecute us know not what they do. They really injure themselves more grievously than they injure us ; their injustice wounds us indeed, but it destroys them. Since, then, their hatred is so furious that it turns them into madmen, literally not knowing what they do,

blind with passion, wholly unaware of the certain reaction upon themselves of what they are inflicting upon us; since we are perfectly aware of this, why do we not treat them as men who have lost their senses, with patience and gentleness, with pity even for their condition? Instead of this, we give full vent to our vindictive feelings, and consider that it would be a sort of degradation to offer meekness and endurance in return for insults and ill-treatment. Sometimes even we do worse; we treat our enemies as though they were actually beneath our contempt. We insult them by our disdain and a pretended show of pity, thus turning the divine qualities of mercy and patience into weapons of offence against them.

Ah! do not let it be thus with us. Christians as we are in name, let us be so also in deed; on this Good Friday let us resolve that it shall not draw to a close before we have given to Christ Crucified, to Jesus our Divine Redeemer, all those vindictive feelings, all that angry resentment the abandonment of which His Passion and Death demand of us as our share in His stupendous Sacrifice! Following His example, let us forgive our enemies; and remember that unless we do this, for us there is no Easter. I know very well all the arguments which the world brings against this Christian forgiveness. We are told that it is bad policy to make too small account of ourselves; that even if we do not feel any great resentment for injuries done to us, we must behave as if we did, so as to make ourselves properly feared and respected, not allowing people to think that we are ready to put up with any injuries which they may choose to offer us. This anti-Christian maxim might be very suitable if we had only our worldly interests to consult, but we have something

of far greater importance, something that affects our eternal interests, to consider. We have to make a claim upon Divine mercy, we have to deal with a God Who only forgives those who forgive others sincerely ; a God Who makes this the absolute condition of His pardon. How blind we are, then, if we do not sacrifice our perishable human interest to our immortal eternal interest. Forgive then ; but when once you have granted this forgiveness, let there be no more coldness, no estrangement, no lurking bitterness and unkindness even in thought. I tell you most emphatically, and Christ Himself upon the Cross bears witness to the truth of my words, that the kind of forgiveness practised in the world is a mere travesty, an absolute mockery, of that which the Gospel teaches us. What ! we are to be friends again, but only at a distance ; we do not care to meet one another face to face ; we have no wish to forget all that gave us so much umbrage in the past, even though we say that we forgive it. Ah ! but this is not to forgive as Jesus Christ forgave. Try to do something more like what His Gospel bids you do, more like what His Divine example puts before you. Use your utmost efforts to re-establish the old confidence between yourself and the offender who was once your friend, to rekindle the old flame of affection by benefits and acts of kindness : *Do good* (Matt. v. 44). Do you ask me why ? I have no other answer to give than that which is given by the Mystery of the Cross. Let us once for all decide this point as the Gospel has decided it ; the Precious Blood, the example of Jesus Christ, are an all-sufficient reason for this Christian forgiveness ; if we do not practise it, for us there can be no communion with Jesus Christ, no fellowship in the Cross, no share in the

pardon which He implored for us from His Eternal Father.

For you are not ignorant that we were all included in that prayer of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Nailed to the tree of shame, with outstretched arms and holy hands uplifted to God, He seems as though He were thus raised above the earth only to see at His feet the crowd of mockers who deride and blaspheme Him. But no ; He sees far, far beyond them ; His eyes, though dim with blood, are penetrating into the ages of futurity ; He sees there all men with all their sins, He sees you and me, yes, all of us individually and in particular. To each of us He says : *I have seen thee, and I have called thee by thy name* (Isa. xliii. 1). Every sin of ours is as clearly standing out before that piercing vision as the sins of the Jews who are persecuting Him. He sees us to be no less blinded, no less held captive by our passions than they ; and, touched with compassion, He is more ready to deplore our blindness than to blame our sin. Therefore turning to His Father, He asks Him with tears to take pity on our ignorance. In truth, sinners are doubly blind, they neither know what they are doing, nor whither they are being led ; as it was with the Jews, so it is with them.

The Jews were indeed miserably blind, since, though they had been witnesses of so many signs and miracles, they failed to recognize the dignity of Him Who had worked those miracles, and dared to lay their sacrilegious hands upon Him. More than this. Having to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, they (as St. Peter tells us) *denied the Holy One and the Just, set at liberty the murderer, and delivered up to death the Author of Life* (Acts iii. 14–15). To this statement, terrible in its truth and in its distinctness of utterance, I need add no

words of mine. It is surely enough to know that they nailed their Saviour and God to the Cross ; but when we add to this fact the consideration of whose place He filled there, the thought of the indignity offered to Him by this choice is almost overpowering. And yet whether we burn with indignation at the injustice of the Jews, or marvel at such incredible blindness, let us at the same time look to ourselves, let us question our own consciences, let us judge our own thoughts and actions. What do we give up ? what do we choose ? what do we prefer to Jesus Christ ? to what or to whom do we not only give life but even that throne in our hearts which is by right only His ? what is it which makes us cry, with the Jews : *Away with Him ! away with Him ! let Him be crucified !* (John xix. 15) ; and ourselves of our own act *crucify the Son of God afresh* (Heb. vi. 6) ? Ah ! is not this on our part a terrible blindness ? and after making such a choice, so base, so deluded, so soul-destroying, what hope would remain to us of our eternal salvation had not Jesus Christ on the Cross prayed for all those who know not what they do ?

But still less do we think of all that this awful choice entails upon us, of the Divine vengeance which it draws down upon our heads. The Jews indeed satisfied their hatred, and while they shed this innocent Blood with such inhuman fury, they dared to cry, *His Blood be upon us, and upon our children !* (Matt. xxvii. 25). They knew not what they did or what they said, and little thought that while they were slaking their thirst for vengeance, they were only hastening the hour for their own condemnation and final ruin. Disloyal and accursed race ! this Blood will indeed be upon you, fulfilling your own words. It will stir up against you

relentless enemies who will beat down your strong walls and fortresses, and raze to the ground your beautiful Temple, the glory and wonder of the whole world. They neither know nor understand ; blinded by passion, they cannot see the gathering clouds of Divine wrath which are threatening to overwhelm them. And so it is with us. Intoxicated with our own tumultuous passions, we do not see the approach of that Day of the Lord, which is a day of darkness and of heaviness, a day of tempest and of earthquake, a day of eternal reprobation. We do not see the signs of its coming, we make no preparation to meet the redoubled strokes which will be dealt by the unerring hand of Divine Justice. Jesus Christ Himself succumbs beneath this awful burden ; He is afflicted, troubled ; the sweat pours from Him in great drops of blood ; He complains of being forsaken, He finds no consolation in this Agony.

Thus we behold a Saviour, our own Divine Jesus, treading alone the wine-press of the wrath of God. The women of Jerusalem are touched with compassion at the sight of His immeasurable sufferings. They are weeping for Him and He does not disregard their pity ; but listen to His words as He turns and speaks to them. What does He say ? *Weep not for Me, but for yourselves and for your children* (Luke xxiii. 28). Weep for the calamities which are coming upon you, *for if they do these things in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry ?* (Luke xxiii. 31). Christians, you who marvel to see Jesus Christ so cruelly treated, marvel also at yourselves, and at the penalties which you are bringing down upon your own guilty heads. If Divine justice does not spare the Innocent, because Innocence has put itself in the place of sinners, what must the sinners themselves expect, despising as they do the mercy

which is offered to them? If this green wood, this living wood; if Jesus Christ, the Tree of Life bearing fruits for the healing of the whole world, is not spared, what of you, sinners, dry wood, trees torn up by the roots and good for nothing but to feed the flame of the undying fire of Hell; what (I say) must you expect? This is what we cannot see, cannot imagine; and Jesus, touched with compassion for the miseries which are in store for us, cries aloud from the Cross: "Father! have pity on these madmen who run blindfold to their own eternal destruction, laughing, clapping their hands, applauding one another. Father! have pity on their ignorance, nay, rather on their insensate folly; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*" (Luke xxiii. 34). And not only does our Divine Saviour pray for us; He does more, He offers Himself a sacrifice for us: *God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself* (2 Cor. v. 19).

But what does it avail us that Jesus Christ so entreats the Eternal Father for us, and that He has paid the price of our redemption with His own Blood, if we perish amid the mysteries of our salvation and within sight of the Cross, by neglecting to apply to ourselves the graces which that Cross offers to us? Ah! these are the days of healing when Jesus Christ *desires to keep the Pasch with us.* The days in which our pastors, our preachers, the whole Church cries out to us: *We beseech you, for Christ's sake be reconciled to God* (2 Cor. v. 20). Is there one among us who has not, during this solemn season, been resolving to approach the Holy Table? This is indeed a good and wise resolution, a devout and holy purpose; but yet I must ask you to pause for a moment and hear me while I say to you in the words of the Apostle: *Let a man prove himself* (1 Cor. xi. 28). The act which you are about

to make is the most sacred, the most august, the most important of all those which our Christian Faith calls upon us to perform. It is nothing less than to receive into our own mouths our condemnation or our eternal life, into our inmost being pardon or death. The Mystery of the Eucharist is the sacred memorial of the Passion of Jesus ; in the Eucharist He is again on Calvary, in it He sheds again for our salvation the Blood of the New Testament, in it He renews, He represents, He perpetuates His holy Sacrifice.

We have, in contemplating the Passion of Jesus, dwelt upon the guilt of His enemies and His own infinite sanctity ; but now when we are speaking of your approaching Paschal Communion, the question is, in which of these two things, the sanctity of the Victim or the guilt of those who sacrifice Him, are you going to take a part ? Will you imitate the multitude in their violence, Judas in his treachery, or your Divine Saviour in His perfect obedience, His meek submission, His forgiveness of injuries ? There is nothing which Almighty God avenges more terribly than the profanation of His Holy Mysteries. In an act then of which the issues are so vitally important, well may the Apostle warn us to pause and examine ourselves closely and searchingly. Now, in front of the holy Altar, let each one of you go deep down into the innermost recesses of his conscience. Forget for a moment all your worldly cares and interests ; for what is there that can be so important, so deserving of our most intent consideration, as the rendering ourselves worthy of Jesus Christ ? and is it possible for the heart of man to imagine anything more life-giving than the right reception, anything more soul-destroying than the profanation, of this adorable Mystery ?

VI

THE THOUGHT OF DEATH

By Bourdaloue

"Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Gen. iii. 19).

This is the end to which all the designs of mankind and all the pomp of worldly greatness must come at last. This remembrance will be displeasing to you; but by disturbing and afflicting you, it will be salutary.

Death is the mirror which represents without disguise the general instability, the constant fluctuation, the daily decay of all earthly things; and the darksome grave makes a source of light by which our intellectual powers and our senses are feelingly affected. In the day of death, says the Scripture of those worldly and carnal men who give the reins to their passions, *all their thoughts shall perish* (Ps. xlv.); what they once esteemed they will hold in contempt, and what they passionately admired will put them to shame. David begged of God as an extraordinary favour that He would *make him know his end* (Ps. xiii.), so that he might know *the number of his days and what was wanting to him* (Ps. xiii.). *Behold*, he adds, *Thou hast made my days measurable; all things are vanity, every man living; man passeth as an image; he storeth up, and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things* (Ps. xiii.).

The thought of death is a most sovereign remedy to extinguish the fire of our unruly passions. These passions are insatiable and without bounds. Was ever the heart of an avaricious man contented with prosperity and overflowing riches? What voluptuary was ever ready to put an end to his pleasures? Nature is satisfied with necessaries; reason bends her view to the profitable and the decorous; self-love goes in quest of the agreeable and the delightful; but passion is impetuous for superfluity and excess. Now this excess of passion may, if we will, be restrained by the remembrance of death, as it will be restrained, in spite of us, by death itself. "Remember, man, thou art but dust," the Church says to us on Ash Wednesday, "and unto dust thou shalt return." I need only address this decree to every one who is swayed by passion, in order to divest him of those unmeasurable desires which perpetually torment him. I need only give him the invitation which the Jewish people gave the Saviour of the world when they asked Him to *come and behold* the tomb of Lazarus. You inwardly burn with an insatiable desire of amassing wealth, and your avarice steels your heart to the miseries of the poor and throws you into an utter forgetfulness of your salvation. *Come and behold;* look at this dead body. This was a man of fortune, like you; and he, like you, became rich and left behind him an opulent family. But do you see him now? Do you see the nakedness, the poverty, to which death has reduced him? Where are his revenues? Where are his riches? Where is his sumptuous and magnificent furniture? Has he anything more than the dregs of mankind have? Six feet of earth; a shroud to wind him up in, but which will not keep him from rotting and becoming the food of

worms. What is all the rest come to ? Come, man of the world, *come and behold,* you who are infatuated with false greatness. Ambition possesses your very soul and inwardly devours you ; it extinguishes in your heart every sentiment of religion ; it enchants and intoxicates you. Consider this sepulchre What do you see in it ? This man was, like you, a man of note and rank, perhaps more so than you ; he was distinguished by his quality, like you ; he was in a fair way of gaining everything that his heart could wish. But do you know him again ? Do you see the condition to which death has reduced him ? Do you see how it has limited his extensive projects ? Do you see how it sports with his airy views ? This ought to be a rule for regulating yours. Come, woman of the world, *come and behold ;* you who are so vain of your person and so pleased with yourself. Your darling passion is the care of your beauty. It subjects you to an unbecoming and vicious delicacy ; it produces criminal desires of pleasing and induces you to be an accomplice in scandals and to co-operate in a thousand sins. *Come and behold* this grave. This was a young person, as well as you ; she was the idol of men, as well as you ; she was as sprightly as you ; she was as much courted, and had as many and as obsequious admirers, as you. But do you see her now ? Do you see those sightless eyes, that hideous face, the frightful countenance ? This is enough to restrain that unmeasurable love of yourself : come and behold.

Revolve in your mind what Solomon said, and say, like him : *The death of the fool and mine shall be one, the learned dieth in the same manner as the unlearned* (Eccles. ii. 15–16). With the Psalmist, let us say of ourselves : *You are gods and all of you the sons of the Most High, but*

you shall die like men (Ps. xixc.). Descend alive and in spirit into the grave ; and you will see that the man of learning and knowledge mixes there with the illiterate and ignorant, the nobleman with the tradesman, the most renowned conqueror with the meanest slave, all covered with the same earth, all surrounded with the same darkness, all eaten by the same worms, all liable to the same corruption and rottenness and dust : *The small and great are there, and the servant free from his master* (Job iii. 19). When we make these reflections, the thought of death assuages the swellings of our heart, brings down all its ferment, and preserves it in humility and sage moderation ; death speaks to us of the equality God has ordained between us and the rest of mankind, an equality we so willingly consign to oblivion but the prospect of which is so salutary to us.

VII

DEATH

By Bossuet

To undertake to tell men that they are very insignificant, is truly a bold venture. There is perhaps no living individual who is not jealous of his own personality, and who would not rather remain blind to his weaknesses than have his eyes opened to them ? Especially is this the case in high places. Men of rank and fortune expect to be treated in this matter with the most delicate consideration ; they are by no means pleased to have their failings noticed, and if we cannot avoid seeing their defects, we must, at least by their desire, conceal them. And yet, thanks to death, we can speak of them freely. There is nothing in this world so great as not to be conscious in itself of much that is mean and small. But so inordinate is our vanity that we cannot discern wherein our weakness lies. O Eternal Wisdom, praise be to Thee alone ! As for human greatness, on whichever side I consider it, except in as far as that it comes from God and must return to Him, thus revealing from time to time a little spark of the Light Divine which, abiding and folded up in it, must demand my reverence,—excepting for this, I repeat, there is no point of view from which I can regard human greatness without seeing in it absolute nothingness. And why ? Because whichever way I turn it I always find death

staring it in the face,—death which spreads such grey shadows over all the vivid colouring of the world's splendour, that I lose myself in bewilderment and know not how to give so magnificent a title as greatness to a thing so disfigured and obscured.

But let us make ourselves quite certain, quite convinced of this important truth by an incontrovertible reasoning. The accident [1] cannot be nobler than the substance,[1] the accessory more considerable than the principal, the building more solid than the foundation on which it is raised, nor, finally, can that which is attached to our being be greater or more important than that being itself. Well, and what then is our being? O Death, do thou speak to us, and tell us what it is, for men are too proud to believe me when I assure them of the truth. What! art thou dumb, pale spectre? dost thou only speak with thy hollow eyes to our fearful gaze? A great king shall lend thee his voice, so that the ears of men may hear, and that these sublime truths may find their way through the portal of human hearts.

Listen to David, seated on his royal throne, in the midst of his court, giving no uncertain utterance to the grave and majestically beautiful thoughts which fill his soul. They are worthy of your attention: *Behold, Thou hast made my days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before Thee* (Ps. xxxviii. 6). O Eternal King of Ages, Who art always with Thyself, always in Thyself; Thy being, everlastingly immutable, neither passes away nor changes, nor is measurable: but for myself, I can own with the Psalmist that my substance is as nothing before Thee, even because my life on

[1] These two terms are here employed in their technical scholastic sense.

earth is measurable. For all that is measurable has an end, and when that end is reached all that was is destroyed and is as if it had never been. What are a hundred years, what are a thousand, seeing that one single moment can blot them out for ever? Multiply the days of your life like those of the fabulous stag that is supposed to have existed through so many ages; or like those of the giant oak beneath which our far-away, long-forgotten ancestors rested and which will continue to give shade to our posterity; in this long space of years, which seems so interminable, heap up honours, pleasures, riches. It is indeed a vast pile, glittering, splendid; it looks, too, as if it were solid! But, ah! what will it avail you, since the last, faint, fluttering breath which in dying you will breathe forth will blow down this showy erection just as easily as a child's house of cards is tumbled to pieces by a puff from the baby lips? And what will it avail you to have written so much in the pages of your life's story, written it too in such bold characters, with such fine phrases and rounded periods; what, I say, will it all avail you, when suddenly, without perhaps a moment's warning, a hand will come forth out of the darkness and will erase every entry which you have made in that book, not even leaving behind, as other erasures do, any trace of itself; for that last moment which with one stroke will blot out the whole of your life, will lose itself with all the rest in this abyss of nothingness, there will no longer be left on earth a single vestige of what we now are? Our flesh will change its nature, our body will be called by another name; and even that new name of corpse will not long be left to it; it will become (as Tertullian says) a something which has no name in any tongue. So true is it that all that is in man dies;

not even the poor epithets of the grave which were applied to his sad remains survive him more than a few hours or days.

What then, O Great God, is my substance ? I enter life, only very soon to quit it. I just show myself to the world, as do others ; then, like them, I must disappear. Everything speaks to us of death. Nature, as though almost grudging the gift she has bestowed upon us, reminds us again and again by reiterated warnings that she cannot much longer let us keep the small amount of matter she has lent us ; she wants it for other forms, she demands it back that she may employ it in other structures.

Then, the perpetual renewing of the human race is only another reminder of our insignificance, our nothingness. Day by day children are born, grow up, and, as they push forward in the race, seem to elbow us aside, saying : " Out of our way, it is our turn now." As we see others passing away thus before us, our successors will see us pass. O God, our Creator ! again I ask, what are we ? If I look forward, what an infinite tract spreads itself before me, in which I am not ! If I look backward, what a fearful shadowy multitude, wherein equally I am not ! How small is the space I fill in this vast abyss of time ! I am nothing ! So brief an interval as is allotted to me is not sufficient to give me any standpoint, any distinguishing mark to separate me from the cloudy mists of nothingness which enfold me. I was only sent here to make up a required number ; they do not even know what to do with me on life's stage, and the piece might have been played out just as well had I remained behind the scenes.

Again, to discuss the matter more abstrusely, we may remind ourselves that it is not even the compass of our

whole life which separates us from this nothingness,—it is never more than a single moment that draws the dividing line between us and it. Now we hold that moment in our grasp, an instant and it has fallen from that grasp ; it perishes, and with it we perish too, did we not unconsciously seize hold of the next, and so on till at last there comes a moment which is so far beyond our reach that no straining effort of ours can lay hold to it ; and then unsupported, left without a prop, we fall instantly. O feeble stay of our being ! crumbling foundation of our substance ! *Man passes as an image* (Ps. xxxviii. 7). Yes, truly he passes away like a shadow, or as the representation of an image ; and as he has nothing enduring in himself, he only pursues what is vain and fleeting, the shadow of the good, not the good itself ; he is *an image and disquiets himself in vain.*

How small the place is which we occupy in this world ! so small indeed and so unimportant that sometimes, with Arnobius, I am inclined to doubt whether I am sleeping or waking. I know not whether what I call waking may not really only be the rather more restless and excited phase of a deep slumber ; and whether I see actual real objects or am only troubled by shadowy fancies and vain images.

The fashion of this world passeth away (1 Cor. vii. 13) ; yes, *and my substance is as nothing before Thee* (Ps. xxxviii. 6). I am carried along so swiftly that it seems to me as if all things were flying from me, all things escaping from my grasp. It is true, all things are indeed hurrying along. Nothing can arrest this rapid onward march to the grave. Each one of us, motionless as he may seem in his place, listening it may be to the warning voice of the preacher, is not really motion-

less, but is silently moving on his way, getting, little as he imagines it, farther and farther from his neighbour now sitting by his side. We are all, every one of us, approaching insensibly but swiftly the moment of that last separation. *Behold, Thou hast made my days measurable.*

But of one other thing let us be assured. Although our lot may have been cast in that portion of the universe which is the theatre of change and the empire of death ; moreover, although this same death is inherent in our nature and we carry about within us its germs, yet, nevertheless, in spite of that darkening of our intelligence which comes from the prejudices of our senses, if only we knew how to penetrate the sheath of mere matter, if we only can as it were withdraw into ourselves, into the innermost recesses of our being, we shall find there a something which by its very vigour betrays its Divine origin and which corruption cannot touch.

I am not one who sets great store by human knowledge, yet I am bound to confess that I cannot help admiring all that science has done in her determination to fathom the deep secrets of nature, her marvellous discoveries, and the splendid inventions by which art has adapted them to our use. Man has almost changed the face of the globe. By the power of his mind and will, he has subdued and conquered the brute creation, which otherwise in its strength and fury must have got the upper hand of him. He has even succeeded in bending inanimate nature to his sway : the earth has been compelled by his industrious energy and skill to yield him wholesome and suitable food instead of weeds and thistles, the plants to give him smiling beauty and

sweet scents instead of thorns and brambles, even vegetable poisons to transform themselves into healing remedies for his benefit. I need not remind you how he controls the elements ; how even fire and water, those implacable enemies to one another, are brought into harmony by him and forced to act in unison for his service. More than this, he even climbs to the stars, and teaches them to guide him in his travels by land and sea ; and that he may measure his days more accurately, he obliges the sun to render an account, so to speak, of every step he takes. But enough of this ; we will leave all further enumeration of these wonders to rhetoricians, and treat the subject rather as theologians. It is sufficient for us to consider that God, having formed man (as the oracle of Scripture tells us) to be the lord of creation, has left to him and in him, even though degraded by the Fall, a certain instinct which impels and enables him to seek out through the whole vast realm of nature whatever is necessary to him. This I believe to be the reason why he so boldly carries his enterprise and researches into every quarter of the globe, into every corner of the universe, as if it all belonged to him, as if he had a right to its investigation, its subdual, its subjugation to the carrying out of his own purposes.

Think, however, for a moment how such a creature as man, so feeble in body, so liable to injury and destruction by the adverse forces which surround him ; think, I say, how could one so weak ever have gained such an ascendancy as he has, if there had not dwelt in him some power superior to that of all visible nature, a breath immortal of the Spirit of God, a ray of light shining from the Divine Countenance, a faint but true reflection of His Image in Whose likeness man was

created. If a skilled workman produces some rare and complicated piece of machinery, no one can make use of it without his instructions, explanations, directions. This world is a vast piece of machinery which came from the hand of God, His wisdom alone could have designed it, His power alone could have constructed it. It was for you, men and women, that this complicated and beautiful piece of workmanship was wrought ; for your service and your delight Almighty God has, I may say, given all nature into your hands that you may apply it to your own uses ; He has even permitted you to adorn and embellish it by art, for, after all, what is art but the embellishment of nature ? You may indeed add some colouring to the already vivid tints of this splendid picture. But how could you succeed in setting in motion machinery so strong and at the same time so infinitely delicate ; or how could you add one stroke of the brush that would not mar a picture so exquisite, were it not that you had within yourself, in some part of your being, an offshoot of that Original Art, fertile ideas drawn from those Original Ideas ; in a word, some reflection, some expansion, some little fragment even, of the spirit of that All-Divine Workman Who made the world ? And if this is so, who can fail to see that all nature conspired together cannot quench that spark of Divine fire, cannot destroy that part of ourselves, of our very being, which bears the impress of that Divine sustaining Power ; and therefore that our soul, rising superior to the world and all its combined forces, has nothing to fear except from its Eternal Author and Maker ?

Let us meditate a little longer upon this subject so profitable and so full of interest for us—the indwelling of the image of God in our souls. Let us see in what

manner creatures so beloved by Him, and destined to make all other creatures subservient to them, lay down for themselves those lines of duty which they are bound to follow. Our present nature being as it is so corrupt, I am obliged to confess that in this matter we show how weak we are, and how much we need those immutable rules of morality and conduct which are imposed by reason and which we cannot fail to admire. How is it to be explained that the soul, shrined in a body to which she clings with a fond affection, stirred by its passions, swayed by its emotions, torn by its sufferings, yet by the light of some inward illumination sees and knows that she has a joy all to herself quite apart from the body, a joy so deep, so rapturous, so strong as to defy all the onslaughts of passions, senses, and all their allies ; and, as she meets them face to face, can cry out triumphantly : *To me to die is gain!* (Philip. i. 21), and again : *I rejoice in suffering* (Coloss. i. 24) ? Surely it must be that the soul has discovered some exquisite beauty, closely veiled indeed and hidden, but still there, in what is called duty, which makes her able to declare so positively that she is ready to face courageously, and even joyously, toil and weariness, pains and griefs, nay, death itself, for friend, country, prince, or faith. Is it not also a species of miracle that these enduring maxims of courage, probity, and justice, while they can never be abolished (I do not mean by time, but by change of customs), find still—happily for the human race—far fewer people who decry them than there are who practise them perfectly ?

Undoubtedly, assuredly there is deep down within us a divine light ever shining ; *A ray of brightness beaming from Thy countenance, O Lord, is imprinted on our*

souls. It is by that light that we discover all the undying beauty and attraction of virtue. It is Truth itself that speaks to us and makes us understand that there must be something within us which never dies, since God has made us capable of finding happiness even in death.

All that we have been saying, however, is as nothing compared to the further idea which I want you to dwell upon : the last, loftiest, most admirable feature of our resemblance to God. He knows Himself and contemplates Himself, His very life consists in knowing Himself ; and because men are His image, it is His will that they too should know Him. Know Him ! the Eternal, the Infinite, the All-Holy ; Who is unclogged by matter, unrestrained by boundary or limit, free, absolutely free from all imperfection ! What miracle is this that we should know Him ? We who feel nothing but what is limited, who see nothing but what is mutable, how have we been able to comprehend this eternity ? how even to imagine this infinity ? O eternity, O infinity ! says St. Augustine, entities which our senses cannot apprehend, by what portal have you been able to enter into our souls ? Yet if we are all body and all matter, how can we possibly even form a conception of a pure spirit ? how even succeed in inventing such a name ?

I know that at this point it may be said, and with reason, that when we speak of spirit we do not quite understand what we are talking about ; our feeble imagination, being incapable of so pure an idea, always clothes it in some shadowy sort of body. Yet when that imagination has made its last supreme effort to give it what is most subtile and unearthly in shape and form, does not a ray of Divine light, suddenly flashing

upon it from the depths of our soul, dispel all these phantoms, however delicate and ethereal we may have fashioned them, and from these same mysterious depths do we not hear the whisper: 'I know not what it is, but it is not that.' What force, what energy, what secret virtue the soul feels within her, to correct herself, to contradict herself, to dare to reject all that she thinks! Who does not see that there is in her a secret spring which does not yet act with its full strength, but which, although it may now be cramped, and though it may not yet have full liberty of motion, makes it very evident by its very vigour that it does not owe its origin solely to matter, but is attached by some hidden chain to a far loftier principle?

It is, however, only too true that the soul does not long maintain this exalted tone and attitude; soon, alas! the delicate beauty of her ideas grows coarse and dull, and she sinks back into the mire of materialism. She has her weaknesses, her languors, her incomprehensible earthly-mindedness, which, unless she is enlightened by some Divine illumination, almost compel her to doubt what she really is. This is why the sages of old, seeing man on one side so great, on the other so contemptible, knew not what to say or to think of such a strange anomaly. Ask the pagan philosophers what man is. Some will make a god of him, others a mere nonentity. This one will tell you that nature cherishes him as her beloved child; another, that she turns him out of doors as a cruel step-mother might do, treating him as the very off-scouring of the earth; while a third, being quite unable to solve the enigma of so contradictory a being, declares that nature amused herself with joining together two halves which had nothing to do with one another, and thus by a mere

freak of fancy formed the prodigy which is called man.

You, however, know very well that neither one nor the other of these so-called philosophers hit the mark, and that Faith alone can solve this great enigma. You were mistaken, all of you, sages of bygone ages ; man is not the delight of nature, since in so many ways he outrages her ; neither can he be her refuse and off-scouring, since in him there is a something which she —I speak of irrational nature—knows to be superior to herself. Whence then comes so strange a disproportion of being ? Need I tell you ? Look at this building, or rather at its ruins ; they indeed display a thousand incongruities ; the solidity and strength of the foundations surely bear the impress of a Divine hand, while the inequalities of the edifice indicate that sin has intermeddled to mar its completion and perfection. Words seem to fail me as I dwell upon this sorrowful thought ; I must borrow those of the mourning Prophet : *Is this the city of perfect beauty ? the joy of the whole earth ?* (Lam. ii. 15). Can this be man, made in the image of God, the miracle of His wisdom, the masterpiece of His handiwork ? Yes, in truth it is he. We know it of a certainty. Whence then comes all this discordance ? Why do I see these ill-proportioned parts ? This is the reason. Man desired to build in his own fashion upon the foundation laid by his Creator, and in so doing departed from the original plan, from the perfect design of the Divine Architect. Hence this strange anomaly : the immortal and the corruptible, the spiritual and the carnal, the angelic and the animal, all thrown together in a marvellous confusion. That is the solution of the riddle of humanity. Faith gives us back to ourselves ; and our deplor-

able infirmities can no longer hide from us our inherent dignity.[1]

But, alas! what does this dignity avail us? Although in our ruined nature there still lurks some faint shadow of greatness, we are none the less oppressed. Overwhelmed, half buried beneath those ruins, the certainty of our immortality only serves to render the tyranny of death more insupportable to us; and although our souls escape indeed from the bondage of death, yet the consciousness of sin wraps them in such unutterable misery that the thought of eternity can only be dark and dreadful. What shall we say to this? How shall we answer the sad appeal of these poor souls? Jesus Christ Himself, standing by the open grave of Lazarus, shall answer it. He has come indeed to visit Lazarus, His friend, who is dead; but in him He visits the whole human race groaning under the dominion of death. In Him we see the Divine Architect coming to view His work and to discover what is amiss in the building. He intends to reform it, so that it may correspond in all its details to the original model, *according to the image of Him Who created it* (Col. iii. 10).

O soul, laden with sin, you may well dread the immortality which would render your death eternal. But here in the person of Jesus Christ you behold the *Resurrection and the Life* (John xi. 25–26); he that believes in Him shall never die; he that believes in Him is already living an interior spiritual life, living the life of grace which leads to the life of glory. But

[1] "It is dangerous to prove to man too plainly how nearly he is on a level with the brutes without showing him his greatness; it is also dangerous to show him his greatness too clearly apart from his vileness. It is still more dangerous to leave him in ignorance of both. But it is of great advantage to show him both."—PASCAL, *Thoughts*. (London: Bell and Sons).

the body meanwhile is subject to death. O soul, be comforted ! If this Divine Architect Who has undertaken to repair your ruined tenement, lets piece after piece of the crumbling tabernacle of your body fall, it is only because He wishes to restore it to you in a better condition, to rebuild it for you in a more stately, a more perfect form. Just for a little while death will hold the citadel, but not to keep possession of it, or of anything belonging to it, excepting only its mortality.

Never for one moment try to persuade yourselves that we ought to regard, as chemists would, the corruption of our body as merely the natural process of the decomposition of a compound organism. Our mind must rise to a higher level, and we must believe, in accordance with the teaching of Christianity, that what necessitates the process of the body's corruption is the fact that it has been tainted with sin, a source of impure desires, in a word, as the holy Apostle tells us, *sinful flesh* (Rom. viii. 3). Such flesh must be destroyed ; yes, even in the case of the elect ; for while it is in this condition, while it is *sinful flesh*, it can never be worthy to be reunited to a blessed soul, nor to enter into the Kingdom of God. *Flesh and blood cannot possess the Kingdom of God* (1 Cor. xv. 50). It must then change its original form in order that it may be renewed ; it must lose its older being, that it may receive another from the hand of God. As an old irregularly-built mansion which has become dilapidated in the course of years, is purposely not repaired or redecorated, because the owner wishes to rebuild it in a better style of architecture ; so is it with this flesh of ours, all disfigured and ruined as it is by sin and passion. God permits it to crumble into dust, that He may remake it in His own fashion and according to His original plan of

creation. It must be reduced to dust, because it has lent itself to the service of sin.

You see, do you not, the Divine Jesus opening the tomb of Lazarus ? He is the Prince of Life, Who opens the prison-doors to set the poor captives free. The dead bodies that are shut up there will one day hear His voice, and they will rise again as did Lazarus. Nay, they will rise to a better resurrection than that of Lazarus, for they will rise to die no more. Death then shall be destroyed ; *Death shall be no more* (Apoc. xxi. 4).

What then, Christian soul, do you fear in the approach of death ? Perhaps that when your house falls about you in ruins you will be left homeless, unsheltered, desolate ? But hear the consoling words of the great Apostle St. Paul : *We know*, he says ; we have not been induced to believe by somewhat doubtful conjecture, but we *know* assuredly and with the most absolute certainty *that if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in Heaven* (2 Cor. v. 1).

Each time that death comes among us and takes from us those we love, let our sorrow be blended with consolation, and our tears be speedily dried by the teaching of our Faith ; let death speak to us of Jesus Christ and of the Heavenly Mansions to which we journey as we leave this life. *Be not sorrowful, even as others who have no hope* (1 Thess. iv. 12).[1]

[1] This last paragraph, which is not in the original, is here added from one of Bossuet's Letters.

VIII

PENANCE

By Bossuet

It is no doubt natural that man should allow himself to be easily carried away into opposite extremes. The fever patient, when his malady has reached its height, despairs of recovery; but the very same individual, having regained his health, thinks himself immortal. In the horror of a great storm at sea, the terrified mariner resolves never for the future to trust himself to the mercy of the waves; but no sooner has the tempest abated than he pushes off again from shore with as little fear or hesitation as if he held the winds and waves in his own hands. A man who thinks that he may be ruined by some dangerous intrigue in which he has become involved at Court, withdraws from its perilous delights without a regret; but as soon as he has freed himself from the entanglement, whatever it may be, he flings himself as recklessly as ever into the vortex, as recklessly and with as little fear of consequences as though, having given such hostages to fortune in the past, he were perfectly safe in her hands for the future. In the case of sinners, this strange disorder and inconsistency of conduct is especially to be noticed, although it displays itself in a contrary manner. The rash folly and presumption by which they buoy themselves up in their sins, ends in despair. In the full

flash of their wickedness, they cannot believe that God will punish them ; then suddenly crushed under the weight of their crimes, they can no longer believe that He will pardon them : thus they go from sin to sin, ruin certain and most terrible staring them in the face ; *made desperate by their very hope*, as St. Augustine says.

Think for a moment of a man who, although he has allowed himself to be carried away by the unrestrained violence of his passions and has broken almost every law human and divine, yet cannot bring himself to believe that a God so great and so good would tyrannize over His creature, or show His power by dashing to pieces such a poor earthen vessel. For a long time he goes on soothing himself with the thought that it would be wholly unworthy of the majesty of his Creator to take offence at the doings of a mere nonentity, or to sit in judgment upon such a one. Then veering round entirely to the opposite view of the subject, he is suddenly overwhelmed at the idea of such a despicable creature daring to set himself up against Almighty God. He asks himself then the same question as the Prophet asked of the Captain of the Assyrians—asked and answered in the same breath : *Against whom hast thou blasphemed ? against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high ? Against the Holy One of Israel* (4 Kings xix. 22). And as the thought of the All-Holy One Whom he has offended takes possession of the sinner's mind, all his presumption and effrontery forsake him ; and he who could imagine no crime too great for the pardoning mercy of God, can now conceive no possibility of appeasing His anger. And now what think you is the cause of such surprising change of opinion, such inconsistency in the sinner's judgment ? It is this. Both these attributes of Almighty God, His

Mercy and His Justice, are so infinitely great, that the contemplation of either of them so wholly occupies the mind that no room is left in it for the perception of the other. Moreover, these two attributes being apparently opposed to one another, it is not easy to understand how the two can subsist together in their supreme perfection. Thus the sinner, having grasped the idea of mercy in all its sublime beauty, cannot at the same time hold that of justice : and it is just so with regard to the latter attribute ; once it is admitted into his mind, there is no room left there for the other. And so the agony of his despair is as intense as was the mad folly and presumption of his hope.

But it must not be so with us ; we must away with those vain travesties of mercy and justice which the sinner worships in place of the true Divine attributes of Almighty God. Poor souls, hoodwinked, nay, blinded by sin, you are mistaken indeed when you persuade yourselves that these two qualities of mercy and justice are incompatible ; on the contrary, they harmonize with one another. For I would have you know that the mercy of God is neither insensible nor unreasonable ; the God Whom we adore is not the God of the Marcionites, a God Who never punishes, so enduring as to make sinners despise Him, so indulgent as to give the impression of weakness. He is not, says Tertullian, a God under Whose sway sins are at their ease, and Who may be defied and scorned with impunity. He displays His mercy, says the same writer, not by enduring evil, but by declaring Himself to be its enemy. His justice is a part of His mercy ; it is the very perfecting of that attribute ; He gives evidence of His love of goodness by His hatred of evil. Never then for an instant allow yourselves to think that

justice is opposed to mercy; on the contrary, the sterner virtue takes the gentler one under its protection, and prevents it from being exposed to contempt.

Let me, however, remind you that mercy is no more opposed to justice than is justice to mercy; for if the latter robs the former of some of its victims, it is only to give them back again under a different form, or rather in a different manner. Instead of abasing them by vengeance, mercy does this by humiliation; instead of crushing them by chastisement, she brings about the same result by the pains of penance; and if nothing but the shedding of a victim's blood can satisfy the demands of justice, then mercy offers to her the Precious Blood of the Divine Victim. Thus, far from being incompatible, they really walk hand in hand. We must therefore neither presume nor despair. We must never presume, sinners as we are, because it is most true that God avenges Himself on such; neither must we ever abandon ourselves to despair, because it is, if I may venture to say so, even more true that God pardons.

This truth being granted, I must try to make you understand, by the aid of the Holy Scriptures, the singular grace of the remission of sins. As this is the principal fruit of the Blood of the New Testament, and the very foundation of all the teaching of the Gospels, the Holy Ghost has taken especial care to impress the idea of it most deeply upon our minds, and to express it in various ways, so that it may penetrate our hearts more and more. He tells us that God forgets our sins, that He does not impute them to us, that He washes them away, that He removes them far from us, and that He blots them out. In order to understand the hidden meaning of these expressions, and of others

which we find in the Sacred Scriptures, we must note very carefully what is the effect produced by sin upon the heart of man, and what is its effect upon the heart of God.

Sin in the heart of man is a poisonous canker eating into it, and a hideous stain which disfigures it. This malignant humour must be purged from our system, rooted out from our vitals : *as far as the east is from the west, so far has He set our iniquities from us* (Ps. cii. 12) ; and as for that shameful stain, the sponge must be passed over it again and again until no trace is left of it : *I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist ; return to Me, for I have redeemed thee* (Isa. xliv. 22).

But let us now consider what is the effect produced by sin upon the heart not of man but of God. It is as a terrible and piercing cry in those ears which are ever attentive to listen ; it is a spectacle of horrors unspeakable to those eyes which are all-seeing and never closed. From such a spectacle those eyes, too pure to behold iniquity, turn away with loathing ; and that cry demands vengeance. Yet in order to reassure sinners, Almighty God declares, through the medium of the Sacred Scriptures, that He covers up their offences, so that He may see them no more ; that He puts them behind His back, lest the sight of them should stir His anger ; finally, that He forgets them, that He remembers them no more. And as for that terrible cry, He stifles its clamour with another voice ; while our sins are accusing us, He brings forward an Advocate to defend us, *Jesus Christ, the Just, Who is the propitiation for our sins* (1 John ii. 1–2) ; He declares that they shall be no more imputed to us, neither shall we ever be brought to account concerning them. *Give praise,*

O ye Heavens; shout with joy, ye ends of the earth; ye mountains, resound with praise, for the Lord hath shewn mercy (Isa. xliv. 23).

You see how the remission of sins is explained and authorized in every form of expression in which a grace or favour can be enunciated. *We exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain* (2 Cor. vi. 1). But what then should be the effect of this grace upon us? Again the Holy Ghost must teach us. *Go*, He says to His Prophet, *and cry towards the north, saying, Return, O rebellious Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not turn away My face from you, for I am holy, saith the Lord, and I will not be angry for ever. And then, a voice was heard in the highways, weeping and lamentation of the children of Israel, because they have made their way wicked, they have forgotten the Lord their God* (Jer. iii. 12, 21). And in another prophecy, Almighty God says: *Cast away from you all your transgressions by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O House of Israel? For I desire not the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; return ye and live* (Ezech. xviii. 31–32). Why will you perish? Why will you so obstinately hurry on to your destruction? God desires to pardon you; it is only you who will not pardon yourselves. *O God! Thou art to me a God of mercy* (Ps. lviii. 11)! *O Name*, says St. Augustine, *in uttering which none shall despair!* Prodigal son, return then to your Father; unfaithful wife, return to your Husband; but return confessing your wickedness; say: *I have sinned* (2 Kings xii. 13). *Acknowledge thy iniquity* (Jer. iii. 13). Do not think of excusing yourselves; never lay the blame of your evil deeds upon surrounding circumstances. Do not even accuse the devil; accuse no one The devil re-

joices when he is accused, says St. Augustine; he desires vehemently that you should lay the blame of every one of your offences upon him, so that you may lose all the fruit of a good confession. Never therefore seek for excuses.

It is one thing to have to deal with a father, and quite another to have to answer for oneself before a judge; in the one case we defend ourselves, in the other we acknowledge our fault; the judge desires our punishment, the father our reformation. But then is this reformation possible? Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the hardened sinner give up his evil practices which seem—fatal as they must be in the end—a very part of himself?

When we are speaking before a judge, we say: 'I did not do it'; or perhaps: 'I was surprised into doing it, I was drawn into the affair quite unintentionally, I never meant to go so far in the matter.' Ah! but we must not defend ourselves in that way before God; do not let us seek vain excuses to cover our ingratitude, which is only too culpable. Before a judge indeed we employ subterfuge, and try to find a means of eluding conviction; but think rather that you are speaking to a Father, and that the simple confession of your fault is the best defence that you can possibly offer: 'I have sinned, I repent of my sin, I throw myself on Thy mercy, I ask pardon for my offence. If no one has yet obtained it of Thee, I am bold enough to presume to sue for it myself; or if Thy mercy has already granted so much grace to others in a state as deplorable as mine, oh, grant me that pardon for which Thou Thyself hast bid me hope.'

The Prophet represents the Synagogue as a despair-

ing wife, unfaithful to her Husband, forsaking Him for strange lovers, then fearing His just wrath, unwilling to return to Him and saying: *I have lost all hope; I will not do it; for I have loved strangers and I will walk after them* (Jer. ii. 25).

There is no need to use studied words to persuade sinners that if they return to God they can easily obtain pardon; for since this work of remission depends absolutely upon Him, there is no difficulty or uncertainty about its good issue. The work, however, of their conversion, that change of heart in them, in which we ask of them their own co-operation, this it is which fills them with despair; for though indeed it is true that in the end all things fall from our hands, and that our excessive weakness can then no longer dispose of anything, yet it is also an undoubted fact that there is nothing of which we can less easily dispose than of ourselves. Strange malady of our nature! there is nothing less within our power than the management of our own will; in a word, nothing less possible for us to do than what our will is set upon doing; so that it is easier for man to obtain from God what he desires than it is to desire it.

Two almost insuperable obstacles prevent us from being masters of our own will—inclination and habit. Inclination makes vice lovable to us, habit makes it necessary. We have neither the beginning of inclination nor the ending of habit in our own power. Inclination first fetters us and then throws us into prison; habit shuts the door of our cell upon us, and then walls up the entrance to the prison, so that escape is impossible. The miserable sinner, finding all attempts to free himself utterly useless, and despairing of deliverance, abandons himself at last to his passions and no

longer tries to restrain them. *Despairing, they have given themselves up to lasciviousness, unto the working of all uncleanness, unto covetousness* (Eph. iv. 19).

When a man is held in bondage by his own temperament, he can but desire that it should be changed, renewed ; that some force outside himself should make another man of him. A passionate, choleric friend will tell us this again and again, when we remonstrate with him for his impatience, his irritability, his outbreaks of rage and violence. He tells us that it is quite impossible for him to rid himself of this tyranny of angry temper which dominates him, that he resists it sometimes, but that in the long run it gets the better of him ; and that if a life more self-controlled, more gentle, more patient, is required of him, there is nothing to be done but to make altogether a new man of him. Now what feeble, impotent nature demands is exactly what grace offers to that nature to enable it to effect the work of reformation ; for conversion is a new birth. The whole man is renewed, from the very seat of life, his heart ; for that heart is crushed, broken, shattered to atoms, and a new heart is given to him by Him Who *hath made the hearts of every one of them* (Ps. xxxii. 15). *In order,* says St. Augustine, *to create a pure heart, the impure heart must be broken.* The source of the stream being turned aside, that stream must of necessity take a new course.

Now if grace can conquer inclination, it will also overcome habit ; for what is habit but a confirmed inclination ? Yes, confirmed, strengthened with a terrible strength, but yet a strength which is weakness compared with that of the Divine Spirit urging us on to victory. If the ice of that frozen heart has to be melted, the Spirit of God breathes upon it and the ice

is broken up, and the tears of repentance flow freely. *His wind shall blow and the waters shall run* (Ps. ciiil. 7). Or if some more violent force must be brought to bear upon the rebellious sinner, God will send His whirlwind, *the blast of the Mighty, beating against a wall* (Isa. xxv. 4), *that Spirit of the Lord which overthrows the mountains* (3 Kings xix. 11). Though you may be hurrying along the downward path which leads to eternal death, more swiftly than the Jordan rushes to the sea, yet Divine grace can stop your rapid course. Though you might be half dead, and fallen into decay and corruption from your sins, that grace can raise you to life again like Lazarus. Only pay heed to the warning of the Apostle: *Receive not the grace of God in vain.*

Yet we must sadly own that we see but few results of the working of this grace ; looking about us in the world, we can note only here and there such reformation of life and conduct as would deserve to be called a new birth. And the explanation of this great evil is that we receive the grace of penance with too little seriousness and too little severity towards ourselves ; we weaken the effect of the grace by our own softness and self-indulgence. There is a species of repentance so feeble and so languid that it throws no energy into any of its purposes of amendment. When we do penance in that way, there is never any great change of life effected, and no splendid victory over our evil habits need be expected. Such is the condition of our nature that well-doing must of necessity cost us something. *We must eat our bread in the sweat of our brow* (Gen. iii. 19) ; penance, in order to be efficacious, must necessarily be a violence done to ourselves. And why ? Because anger and indignation express themselves in violent motions, and St. Augustine tells us that *pen-*

ance is nothing else than a holy indignation against ourselves.

The same great penitent says : *I grieve and humble myself beyond all measure.* His sighs and laments were not like the gentle mourning of a dove, but rather like the roaring of a lion ; they were the passionate groanings of a man stung to a sort of fury by his own vices, unable to endure his own languor, weakness, cowardice. Finding intolerable to him his continual falls, his relapses into sins which he now abhors, the penitent only longs to free himself from the society which had been his ruin, he wants nothing but seclusion and solitude ; he is, in the words of the Psalmist, *like a night-raven in the house* (Ps. ci. 7). In this solitude, in this retirement from the world, he can give full vent to his indignation against himself. He shudders over what he has been and is, he makes the most strenuous efforts to acquire habits different from those which have hitherto been to him as a second nature ; *in order,* says St. Augustine himself, *that the habit of sin may yield to the violence of penance.*

Thus it is that we overcome our inclinations and habits. And if you ask me why such violence is needed, the answer is very simple. The conversion of the sinner is a new birth ; and it is the curse of our fallen nature that pain must attend on every human birth : *in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children* (Gen. iii. 16). This is why penance is so laborious ; it has its groans, it has its travail, because it is the bringing forth of children. A new man must be brought forth, and in doing this the old man must suffer. But in the midst of all this pain and distress, never forget the words of the Gospel : *A woman, when she is in labour, hath sorrow, because her hour is come ; but when she hath brought forth the child,*

she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world (John xvi. 21). Amid these labours and pains of penance, bear in mind that you are bringing forth a child and that that child is yourself. If it is so deep a consolation to have given life and the light of this world to another, that it makes all past anguish forgotten in an instant, what rapture must it not be to feel and know that we have brought our own individual selves into the glorious light that never fades, and to that new life which is immortal. Fear not then, sinners, the pains of this child-bearing which brings with it salvation ; perpetuate not your race but your own being ; preserve not your name but your very self, your whole body and spirit.

Virgins of Jesus Christ, this is the child-bearing which God ordains for you : bring forth sanctity ; renew yourselves in the Lord, amid the pangs and sorrows of penance ; let sinners see, by your example, how nature may be overcome even in her strongest inclinations ; declare a holy war against vice, especially in its most secret, plausible, hidden form, that form in which it rears itself upon the ruin of all the other vices. And as for us, let us at once put our finger upon the festering sore in ourselves. What, you are afraid ! You dare not touch the wound, or apply the knife to eradicate it ! But consider a moment. Is it not better to do a little violence to ourselves here below, to suffer the pangs of the new birth, rather than to die eternally ? *Walk whilst you have the light* (John xii. 35). Do not abuse the time which God accords you.

God Who desires not the death of a sinner but rather that he should be converted, is not contented with stirring and rousing His guilty children by the voice

of the preacher ; He would have all nature invite them to penance ; for the continual succession of days and years are as the voice of the whole universe testifying to His patience, while they warn sinners not to abuse the time which He gives them. *Knowest thou not,* says the Apostle, *that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance? or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and patience* (Rom. ii. 4), which give thee time to repent? It is this grace especially which the Apostle warns you not to allow to slip from you without bearing fruit, for he adds : *I have heard thee in an accepted time* (2 Cor. vi. 2).

In order thoroughly to comprehend the value and the merit of such a grace, we must before all things consider that time may be regarded from two points of view : either as it measures itself, by hours, days, and years, or as it impinges upon eternity. Looking at it from the first point of view, I know that time is nothing, because it has neither form nor substance, because its whole being consists in passing away ; that is to say, its whole being consists in perishing, consequently its whole being is nothing. My life is measured by time ; therefore it is that my substance is nothing, being bound up as it is with time which is itself nothing : *Behold Thou hast made my days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before Thee* (Ps. xxxviii. 6).

Ah ! how strange a thing is this ! Time is nothing, and yet when we lose time we lose everything. Who shall solve this enigma for us ? The truth is this. Time which in itself is nothing has been appointed by God to serve as a passage to eternity. Tertullian says : Time is like a great veil, a vast curtain, which is stretched before eternity and which hides it from us. To reach

eternity we must pass through this curtain. It is the good use of time which gives us a right to what lies beyond it ; and I cannot wonder that the pious souls who live enclosed by holy rule, are so scrupulously careful in the disposal of every moment, seeing that these moments—moments in themselves less than nothing, a shadow, a vapour—are yet, in their bearing upon eternity, of infinite weight and importance, and that there is in consequence nothing more criminal than to receive such a grace in vain.

I will not dwell further on the sorrowful fact of the small esteem in which this grace is generally held, or of the ease with which men allow it to slip from them and be lost. Those who act thus justify themselves, it is true ; but when they tell us openly that they are only thinking how to pass their time, they show us plainly enough how easily they lose it. But what can be the cause that men who grasp so eagerly after wealth and all the good things of this life, and hold to them so tenaciously, yet suffer one of their most precious treasures to slip so easily from their hands ? There are, I find, two causes : one proceeding from ourselves, the other from this same time of which we are speaking.

As regards ourselves, it is not difficult to understand why time escapes from us so easily : it is because we do not wish to take note of its flight. For whether it is that in observing its progress we become aware that the end of our earthly existence draws nearer and nearer, and that we want to keep this sad prospect in the background, or that owing to a certain slothfulness we know not how to employ our time, most undoubtedly true it is that there is nothing we dread so much as to be made to realize its flight. How wearisome are these long sad days, every hour and every moment of

which we count, weighed down by their intolerable heaviness, feeling as if they would never come to an end! Thus time is to us a heavy load which we can scarcely bear when we feel it pressing on our shoulders. This is why we neglect no possible artifice which may prevent our being conscious of it; and such precautions do we take to deceive ourselves as to its passage, that I am not at all surprised at our failing to notice our having lost it. Our one desire often is so to keep it velvet-shod in soft delights that its noiseless footfall as it passes from us is altogether unheeded.

But if we try to deceive ourselves in this matter, time does its part and also helps to strengthen the illusion. Time, says St. Augustine, is an imitation of eternity. A feeble imitation, I own; yet fugitive as it is, time tries to simulate the stability of those never-ending years. Eternity is always the same. Now as time cannot equal it in performance, it tries to do so by swift succession; and this is the means which it employs to deceive us. It takes away one day, it gives us in its place another; it cannot hold back this year which is passing, but it allows another to glide into the empty space left by its predecessor, and they look so much alike that there is no reason for regret. In this way it imposes upon our feeble imagination, so easily deceived, so slow to distinguish the real from the counterfeit; and, if I am not mistaken, this is the malice of time against which the Apostle warns us when he says: *Redeeming the time because the days are evil* (Eph. v. 16). Redeem the time because the days are *evil*, that is to say, malevolent or malicious. We scarcely notice that a year has passed away, because it seems to revive in the next. Thus we hardly observe the flight of time, because in spite of its perpetual varia-

tions it shows us almost always the same face. This is the great evil, this is the mighty obstacle to penance.

Yet in the end the truth is unmasked. Feeble limbs, grey hairs, a visible alteration in every line and feature, nay, in the whole being, constrain us to realize that a great portion of that being is breaking down, falling into decrepitude, even ceasing to exist. But do not forget that the malice of time is still on the watch to deceive you ; see how the subtle impostor tries to save appearances, how he persists in his attempted imitation of eternity. It is the property of eternity to preserve things always in the same condition ; time, in order to approximate to its great rival in some small degree, only robs us of our faculties, our advantages, our cherished possessions of mind and body, by slow degrees ; he despoils us of our goods in so subtle a manner that we are scarcely conscious of his thefts ; he leads us on so gradually step by step to the end that we arrive at it without having thought what we were doing or what was before us. Ezechias was not conscious of his swiftly passing life ; when he had reached his fortieth year he thought that life was only just beginning : *While I was but beginning He cut me off* (Isa. xxxviii. 12). Thus the deceitful malignity of time makes life pass on insensibly, and we give no thought to the business of our conversion. Suddenly, and when we are least thinking about it, we fall into the arms of death ; we are not conscious that our end is drawing near until we have actually reached it. And this it is again which misleads us ; as far as our sight can reach we always see time stretching out before us. It is quite true that it is before us, but yet perhaps we shall never be able to reach it.

Amid all these illusions, we are so much deceived that we actually do not know ourselves, we cannot tell what

to think as to the length of our life. Sometimes we regard it as long ; at other times, as short. It is always too short for the indulgence of our passions and our sinful pleasures ; always too long for penance. Hear what the voluptuous say : *Let us not lose the flower of our age, let us crown ourselves with roses before they wither* (Wisdom ii. 7–8). Think you that they would disturb their luxury of enjoyment by the thought of death, that they would allow so gloomy an image to intrude upon them and sadden them ? They do think of it no doubt, but only as an incentive urging them to enjoy to the full pleasures so fleeting ; *Let us eat and drink,* they cry, *for to-morrow we die* (Isa. xxii. 13). Well, I am rejoiced to find that after all you recognize the shortness of life. As you do recognize it, think also at last of the penance which you have so long deferred, and do not receive the grace of God in vain. But now they suddenly change their tone ; and this life, only too short for their riotous self-indulgence, becomes all at once so long in their estimation that they think they are quite at liberty to spend a large portion of it in their unlawful pleasures. *O ye sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart ?* (Ps. iv. 3). How long will you suffer yourselves to be deceived in this way, as to the lapse of time ? when will you honestly acknowledge to yourselves that life is short ? are you going to wait to do so, till you are drawing your last breath ? But, however it may be, whether you are in the first flower of your age or in the prime of life, the Apostle reminds us all that *the time is at hand.* The days crowd one behind the other, each pushing the other on : we hold back the day of penance, till at last it is lost in the throng. Oh, time which the eternal patience of God grants to sinners to be to them a haven of refuge, must

it only be to them a shoal on which their vessel founders! We have time, let us be converted ! We have time, let us continue in sin ! There is the port, there too is the fatal reef. Consider, sinner, the power which you have received to make a good use of time : that is the port in which the wise find safety. Consider the madness of those who always put off the day of penance : that is the shoal on which the presumptuous founder.

But we still have time before us,—such is the bold assertion of sinners, who in their temerity and assumption of knowledge stop short at nothing. I would ask them to notice this. The Son of God Himself teaches us that the knowledge of times and seasons is one of the secrets which the Father has put into His own power (Acts i. 7). In order to silence human curiosity at once and for ever, Jesus Christ when questioned upon the subject says that He Himself knows it not (Mark xiii. 32). Let us take these words in their simple and literal sense. Our Lord speaks as the Ambassador of the Eternal Father and His Interpreter for us ; what has not been imparted to Him for our instruction is unknown to Him in His capacity of Envoy and Deputy from God to man ; although, at the same time, He, being equal to the Father, sharing all His Divine attributes and being of one and the same nature with Him, knows this and all else perfectly and absolutely. For whatever way we may understand and interpret these words, we must always come to the conclusion that the knowledge of times and seasons, and especially as regards our own last moments, is one of the secret mysteries which it is God's will to keep concealed from His faithful people ; and that He hides from us that last day in order that we may be watchful and observant every day of our lives. And yet where will the bound-

less arrogance of human nature stop? Man in his presumptuous audacity would philosophize about time and try to penetrate the darkness of the future!

But my words are useless; O Lord Jesus, speak Thyself to them, and confound these hard hearts! When we speak to them of the judgments of God, they say that this vision in Ezechiel will not be so soon accomplished, *it is prophesied of times afar off* (Ezech. xii. 27). When we try to scare them with the terrors of death, they flatter themselves that they have still many a year to live. But Jesus Christ brings the matter more closely home to them. Listen to His words, showing them that Divine Justice, stirred to wrath and indignation by their sins, is ready to strike: *Now the axe is laid to the root of the tree* (Matt. iii. 10).

But, sinners, I am ready to grant that you have still a little time left to you. Well then, if so, why do you delay your conversion? Why do you not begin to-day? Are you afraid that your penance will be a day too long? What! not content with being a criminal, you want to prolong the period of your crime! you wish your life to be both evil and long! you wish to offer this insult to God, always asking for time and always losing it; for up to your last moment you go on refusing and rejecting the precious things which He offers to you. That last moment, says St. Chrysostom, is a time for making a last will and testament, rather than for receiving the Holy Mysteries. Do not be one of those who put off learning to know themselves till they have lost consciousness; who wait, almost until the physician has given them up, to ask for the priest to absolve them; who despise their soul so utterly that they never think about saving it until their body is despaired of.

Do penance before the physician is at your bedside,

giving you hours which it is not in his power to give, measuring out the moments of your life by a solemn shake of the head, ready to philosophize admirably upon the nature and the course of your malady, after death. Do not wait to set about your conversion, till your ears are half closed by the dulness of approaching death, so that those who stand about you can scarcely extort from your parched lips a faintly breathed yes or no ; till the priest is struggling to prevail over your greedy heirs or your poor clamorous servants, who are pressing you to make your will or entreating you not to forget to reward their services, while he has only the one thought and care of urging you to receive the Last Sacraments. Be converted now in good time ; do not wait till sickness gives you this salutary advice ; let the thought come from God, not from the wasting fever or the racking anguish of mortal pain ; from reason and not from necessity ; from Divine authority, not from compulsion. Give yourself to God freely, not with constraint and disquietude. If penance is a gift of God, celebrate this Sacrament not in a time of mourning, but in one of joy. Since your conversion is to bring joy to the Angels, it is miserably inappropriate to begin it when your friends and relations are weeping and mourning. If your body is a victim which you must sacrifice to God, consecrate to Him a living victim ; if it is a precious talent which must bear interest in your hands, invest it wisely at once, and do not wait to give it back to Him till you have been obliged to bury it in the earth. After having been the sport of time, take care lest you be the sport of penance, lest it make a pretence of giving itself to you, when all the time it is only mocking you with counterfeit emotions ; beware lest, instead of doing penance in a

Christian manner, you should in the end depart from this life after having only made to Almighty God a sort of apology, such as will not deliver you from the punishment due to your sins. *Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Cor. vi. 2). Avoid the rock on which impenitence will wreck you ; seek the haven into which the goodness of God invites you, and in which His mercy will for ever shelter you.

IX

BLESSED MARY, MOTHER OF GOD AND OUR MOTHER[1]

By Bossuet

"Jesus saith to His mother: Woman, behold thy son. Then He saith to His disciple: Behold thy mother" (John xix. 26, 27).

We read in ancient history how a certain philosopher, dying without leaving wherewith to maintain his wife and children, resolved to make a will, by which he bequeathed the care of his wife and family to his most intimate friend. We are told that he did this, believing (so Lucian says) that he could not better do honour to his friend's merits and show confidence in his generosity. Well, always supposing that this action was done in good faith and that the affection between the two men was mutual, it is well worthy of our admiration. Still we cannot forget that the object for which the sages and so-called great men of the pagan world lived, was rather ostentation and self-glorification than virtue, and that many of their famous sayings and doings were dictated and actuated by a love of display and an affectation of severe gravity. However, we need not dwell longer on that; let us pass on and turn our thoughts to something more divine. What necessity suggested to that poor philosopher infinite love, we may venture to say, suggested to our Crucified

[1] Sermon preached at Navarre to the Confraternity of the Rosary

Saviour. Looking down from His Cross upon Mary and the beloved Disciple, that is, upon all that was dearest to Him in this world, and desiring to leave them some last dying proof of His tenderness, He first gives St. John to His Mother, then His Mother to the beloved Disciple, and by this legacy He establishes on the firm basis of His own Divine authority the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. I hope to show you that by those Divine words, spoken in the darkening gloom of Calvary but destined to echo down through all the ages and illumine the deeper darkness of ignorance and unbelief, Mary, the Mother of an Incarnate God, is proclaimed to be our Mother too, the Mother of all the faithful.

Oh Mary, second Eve, sinless and beautiful, you are indeed our Mother, both by maternal love, and also by the anguish and pains that tore your soul on Calvary ! Let me proceed to show from the Sacred Scriptures how this mystery is to be explained.

There was nothing so near to the Sacred Heart of our Divine Redeemer as the union of Himself with our nature and the establishment of an intimate relationship with us. It was to effect this that He was born into the great human family, so that we by grace might become members of a divine and spiritual family. He united Himself to us by a double tie : by becoming a Child of Adam He at the same time made us children of God, and by this twofold alliance our common father became His and He desires that His own Eternal Father should become ours. This makes Him say in His Gospel : *I ascend to My Father and to your Father* (John xx. 17) ; so that we may understand from these words that He wishes to have all things in common with us,

not even grudging us the privilege of being the children of His Divine Father.

Now that same generous love which induces Him to give us His Heavenly Father makes Him also give us His most Holy Mother. He desires that she should be our Mother spiritually as she was His according to the flesh, so that He might be indeed our Brother. And now I am seeking to show you, from passages in the Holy Scriptures, in what manner Mary is united to the Eternal Father so as to be the Mother of all the faithful. As, however, this task is a weighty one, I will summon to my assistance St. Augustine, who puts this great truth very clearly before us. "Mary," he says, "is, according to the flesh, the Mother of Jesus Christ, and also, according to the spirit, the Mother of all His members, because by her love she co-operated in giving birth in the Church to the children of God." According to St. Augustine's words, then, Mary is the Mother of all the faithful because she begets them by charity. Let us follow along the lines marked out for us by St. Augustine, and explain from the Holy Scriptures this blessed fertility by which we are born of the charity of Mary.

In order to do this we must remember that there are two kinds of fruitfulness: the first in nature; the second in charity. It is needless to explain to you what is that natural fecundity which goes on incessantly in the world, perpetuating the species by the blessing of the Creator. Taking this natural fecundity then for granted, let us pass on to show that not only nature but also charity is fertile. St. Paul teaches us this truth when he says: *My little children, of whom I am in labour again until Christ be formed in you* (Gal. iv. 19). The marvellous fruitfulness of St. Paul's charity is here very evident; for who are those little children whom

he acknowledges for his own, if not those given to him by charity, and what is meant by the birth-pangs of St. Paul, if not the anxious travail and strivings of his charity as he labours to bring forth the faithful in Jesus Christ ? Yes, this is sufficient proof of the fertility of love.

But more than this. We learn from the Bible that this maternal charity not only begets children, but that she also tends and nourishes them with all a mother's unspeakable tenderness ; that she carries them in her bosom and is to them indeed all that the most loving mother can be to her little ones—vigilant, fostering, sustaining, as none but such a mother knows how to be. That truth being established, it will be easy to show you how the Blessed Virgin is united to the Eternal Father in bringing forth the children of the New Covenant.

First, I would have you observe that those two different kinds of fruitfulness which, as we have seen, exist among creatures, also find their place in God, Who is their source. The nature of God is fruitful, so also are His love and charity. This fruitfulness inherent in His nature gives Him His Eternal Son, Who is *the express image of His substance.* But if His natural fertility gave birth to this Divine Son in eternity, His love continually through all time gives life to other sons whom He adopts into His family on earth. It is of this love that we ourselves are born, it is because of this love that we call Him our Father. Seeing and understanding that twofold fertility of God, as far as our poor human intellect can grasp such sublime truths, let us now try to discover how this twofold fertility (which has its source in God alone) was communicated to Mary.

Already it appears that she participates, in a manner, in that natural fertility which gave to the Eternal Father His only-begotten Son. How is this, O Blessed Virgin, how is it that thou art Mother of the Son of God Himself? Is it thine own fruitfulness that gives thee this potency? No, she answers, it is God that has done it, *He that is mighty hath done to me great things* (Luke i. 49). Mary then is not the mother of this Divine Son by her own fruitfulness. Listen to the words of the Angel: *The power of the Most High shall overshadow thee* (Luke i. 35). Let us try to grasp the full meaning of those words. Doubtless the Holy Ghost would have us understand from them that, the fruitfulness of the Eternal Father communicating itself to Mary, she will be the Mother of the Son of God Himself; and this is why the Angel, after having said that the power of the Most High will overshadow her, adds immediately the beautiful words: *Therefore the Holy One that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

How great, how admirable, then, is this dignity of Mary! Yet it is not enough that she should be associated with the Eternal Father as Mother of His only-begotten Son; think you that He will refuse to share with her the children whom He adopts by His charity? Think you that if He is willing to communicate to her His natural fruitfulness in order that she may be the Mother of Jesus Christ, He will not complete His work by bestowing on her liberally the fertility of His love so that she may be also the Mother of all His members? It is for this that my Gospel calls me to Calvary; for it is there, at the foot of the Cross, that I see the most blessed Virgin uniting herself, in the presence of her beloved Son, to the fertile love of the Eternal Father.

Ah ! what a spectacle of love and sorrow, heart-stirring in its solemn beauty and divine pathos !

Can we ever be grateful enough for this boundless charity by which Almighty God condescended to choose us for His children ? Can we ever admire sufficiently this Divine condescension ? For (as St. Augustine reminds us) in the world men do not adopt children until they have given up the hope of having any of their own. The love that they give to those adopted members of their family, is a love which they thrust as it were into a place left vacant by nature, hoping thereby to supply that nature's deficiencies. Not so is it with our great, our all-merciful God. He indeed has through all eternity begotten a Son, Who is equal with Himself, Who is the delight of His heart, Who perfectly satisfies His love and therefore, so to speak, drains its fertility. Whence comes it then that He deigns to adopt us as His children ? It is not indigence, not want, that impels Him to do this, but rather the boundless riches of His charity. It is the infinite fecundity of a superabundant, overflowing love that makes Him give brethren to this first-born Son, companions to this only-begotten Son, and co-heirs to this Beloved of His heart. Oh, generous, untiring love ! Oh, infinite, incomprehensible mercy ! Yet He has done even more than this.

Not only does He in His love adopt us as His children, making us sharers in His Fatherhood with His only-begotten Son, but He delivers up to death that only and beloved Son, in order thereby to give life to His adopted children. Truly a strange and novel kind of fecundity ! In order to produce, it is necessary to destroy ; in order to bring into existence the adopted

sons, the true Son must be sacrificed ! It is Jesus Christ Himself Who teaches me this marvellous truth : *God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish but may have life everlasting* (John iii. 16). This is the charity of the Eternal Father ; He delivers up, He abandons, He sacrifices His only-begotten Son, that He may thereby adopt, vivify, regenerate us.

And now let us look upon Mary, and see what part she plays in this wonderful drama. Why, think you, has her Divine Son called her to the foot of the Cross to be an eye-witness of this appalling spectacle ? Is it in order to pierce her heart, to rend her very soul ? Must her maternal love be so wounded by His deep and cruel wounds ? Must she see that blood, which is so precious to her, flow slowly but unceasingly, drop by drop ? Was it any want of compassion, any severity or coldness, which, instead of sparing her such anguish, condemned her to endure it on Calvary ? No. Let us try to fathom this great mystery. It was necessary that Mary should unite herself with the love of the Eternal Father, and that, in order to save sinners, they should in common accord deliver up to death that Son Whom they owned in common. It even seems to me as if I could hear Mary speaking to that Eternal Father out of the fulness of a heart at once open and straitened; straitened by an intensity of grief, but open through the expansion of a charity which hungered for the salvation of men. Listen to her ; she seems to say : " O my God, since it is Thy Will, I consent to this shameful death to which Thou dost abandon the Saviour of the world. It is Thy Will to save sinners by the death of our innocent, our Divine Son ; let Him then die that men may live." Thus Mary unites her-

self to the fertile love of the Eternal Father; but let us observe with wonder and admiration that at the very moment of this act she receives the gift of her own fecundity: *Woman,* says Jesus, *behold thy son.* Her love deprives her of one beloved Son, her love bestows on her another in His place; and in the person of this one Disciple she becomes by charity the Eve of the New Covenant, the fruitful Mother of all the faithful. For who does not see in that act of renunciation a mother's love? Would she give up her most dear Son for us if she did not love us as her children? What then remains for us to do but to give back love for love, so that in place of the Son Whom she loses she may find a son in each of us? [1]

[1] I am persuaded that the worship of the Madonna has been one of the noblest and most vital graces, and has never been otherwise than productive of true holiness of life and purity of character. . . . There has probably not been an innocent cottage throughout the length and breadth of Europe during the whole period of vital Christianity in which the imagined presence of the Madonna has not given sanctity to the humblest duties and comfort to the sorest trials of the lives of women; and every brightest and loftiest achievement of the arts and strength of manhood has been the fulfilment of the assured prophecy of the poor Israelite maiden: He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is His name."—JOHN RUSKIN.

"The world is governed by its ideals, and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more profound and, on the whole, a more salutary influence than the mediæval conception of the Virgin. For the first time woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognized as well as the sanctity of sorrow. No longer the slave or toy of man, no longer associated only with ideas of degradation and sensuality, woman rose, in the person of the Virgin Mother, into a new sphere, and became the object of a reverential homage of which antiquity had had no conception. Love was idealized. The moral charm and beauty of female excellence was, for the first time, felt. A new type of character was called into being, a new kind of admiration was fostered. Into a harsh and ignorant and benighted age this ideal type infused a conception of gentleness and of purity unknown to the proudest civilization of the past. In the pages of living tenderness, which many a monkish writer has left in honour of his celestial patron; in the millions who in many lands and in many ages have

But I seem to hear you say: What exchange is this you are advising us to make? what have we that we can give to Mary as a substitute for her stupendous loss? would you have us offer her poor mortals in the place of a God, sinners in place of the all-holy Jesus? What I desire that we should all do is this: it is Jesus Christ Whom she gives, let us give her back Jesus Christ in ourselves; and let us bring to life again in our souls this Son Whom for love of us she has lost. I know indeed that God restored Him to her, risen from the dead, glorious, immortal; but although she possesses Him thus in glory, she nevertheless seeks Him still in the hearts of all the faithful. Let us, then, be pure and modest, and Mary will recognize Jesus Christ in us. Let us be humble and obedient as Jesus was even unto death; let our hearts be tender and pitiful, and our hands open to the poor and miserable; let us forgive all injuries as Jesus forgave them. Think what Mary's joy will be when she sees Jesus Christ living in us; in our souls by charity, in our bodies by chastity; yes, even in our eyes and on our faces by self-restraint, modesty, and Christian simplicity! Then indeed it is that, beholding in us so wonderful a conformity to her Beloved and such a living representation of His beauty, she will love Him in us and pour forth upon us all the wealth of a mother's love. And if that is not enough, if our hearts are not softened by

sought with no barren desire to mould their characters into her image; in those holy maidens who, for the love of Mary, have separated themselves from all the glories and pleasures of the world, to seek in fastings and vigils and humble charity to render themselves worthy of her benediction; in the new sense of honour, in the chivalrous respect, in the softness of manners, in the refinement of tastes displayed in all the walks of society; in those and in many other ways we detect its influence. All that was best in Europe clustered around it, and it is the origin of the purest elements of our civilization."—W. E. H. Lecky.

such tenderness, if their hardness needs the discipline of blood and tears to crush them, this is not wanting, as I am going to show you.

St. John, in the Apocalypse, represents the Blessed Virgin under a most striking and admirable figure. He says: *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and being with child, she cried travailing in birth, and was in pain to be delivered* (Apoc. xii.). St. Augustine assures us that this woman is Blessed Mary; and several convincing reasons could be given for his assertion. There is, however, one portion of the sacred text which seems to oppose that theory. This mysterious woman is represented by St. John as crying out in the pangs of childbirth. How is this? Shall we concede that Mary was subject to the curse common to all mothers who bring their children into the world with pain and anguish? No; we know that she brought forth her Divine Son without suffering, just as she conceived Him without concupiscence. Yet what can be the meaning of St. John when he attributes to her the pangs of childbirth?

This is the mystery I am preaching to you; this is the great truth which I am going to proclaim. We must understand that Mary is in a twofold sense a mother begetting children. She brought forth her Divine Son, the Sinless One, without travail, without prejudice to her virginity; she brings forth the faithful, who are sinners, with pain and anguish, yes, at the foot of the Cross, with bitter tears and a broken heart. This is the mystery of which I spoke.

Since, as we have said, it was decreed that the faith-

ful should be born again through the love of the Eternal Father and the sufferings of His Divine Son, it was necessary—in order that Blessed Mary should be the Mother of this new family—that she should be a sharer not only of the fecund love by which the Father has adopted us, but also of the agonies by which the Son gives us life. For must not the Eve of the New Covenant be associated with the New Adam? Hence it is that you see her sorrowful and suffering at the foot of the Cross; so that just as the first Eve beneath the tree once tasted with her disobedient husband the poisonous sweetness of the forbidden fruit, so the Eve of the Gospel might draw near to the Cross of Jesus to taste with Him the bitterness of that mysterious Tree. But let us put this reasoning in a stronger light, and lay it down as a first principle that it was the will of the Saviour of the world that all His fruitfulness should be in His sufferings. We know this from His own teaching; for, speaking by a figure of His death, He says: *Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit* (John xii. 24).

In truth, all the mysteries concerning our Divine Saviour are but one continual fall. He fell from Heaven to Earth, from His Throne to a Crib; from the lowliness of His Birth, by various downward steps, into all the miseries by which His mortal life was encompassed, till they culminated in the ignominy of the Cross and Sepulchre—then He could descend no lower. Yet no sooner had He reached this deepest depth of self-annihilation than He began to display His Divine power; and that germ of immortality (which He kept hidden within Himself beneath the weakness of His flesh) being developed by His death, this grain of wheat

was seen to multiply abundantly and to spring up into life and vigour as the children of God. Such was the blessed fertility generated by His sufferings and death, to which we owe our existence as the adopted sons of His Father. Come then, Mary, Mother of God, to the foot of that Cross on which your Son hangs, come that your maternal love may unite you to those sufferings by which He gives us the new life of regeneration.

And what words of ours can even faintly shadow forth Mary's share in the sufferings of her adorable Son ? She beheld Him, the Beloved of her soul, nailed to the shameful tree, His pierced and bleeding hands outstretched to an unbelieving, pitiless people ; His face so marred and disfigured that there was no beauty remaining in it ; the Precious Blood meanwhile falling drop by drop from that mangled, agonized Body ! As the Divine Jesus infinitely surpasses all other sons, so too the grief of ordinary mothers is but a most imperfect image of that which pierces the heart of Mary. Her affliction is truly boundless and measureless as an ocean. Thus we see how she shares the sufferings of her beloved Son—wounded with His very wounds, transfixed with the nails that fastened Him to the Cross.

But now let us contemplate with admiring love the sequel to this mystery. It is in the midst of all this anguish and desolation of spirit, which unites her intimately with the Passion of Jesus, that He makes her a sharer in His fruitfulness. "*Woman,*" He says, "*behold thy son ;* woman, who art suffering with Me, be also fruitful with Me, be the Mother of those who owe their life to My Passion." Like an earthly mother who dies in bringing her child into the world, Mary in this moment of supreme anguish begets the faithful.

Let us never then forget that we are the children of

Mary, and that she gave birth to us at the foot of the Cross. Let us lay to heart the beautiful words of Ecclesiasticus: *Forget not the groanings of thy mother* (Ecclus. vii. 29). When the world attracts you by its deceitful allurements, let the thought of Mary's tears, and of the pangs of that loving mother, so occupy your imagination that it may have no room left for the poisonous delights of sin. When temptation assails you, when your strength almost fails you under its powerful assaults, when your steps are feeble and tottering in the way of righteousness, when bad example or the fierce fire of youthful passion almost gets the better of you, remember your mother's anguish, her bitter tears, the unspeakable pangs that rent her soul on Calvary. What! would you by your weak yielding to sin set up again a cross that Jesus Christ may once more be nailed to it? Would you, before the very eyes of Mary, thus crucify afresh her Divine Son, crown His Sacred Head with thorns, and trample under foot His Precious Blood, thus reopening every wound in that dear mother's heart? Ah, no! we will not act thus; Mary has already suffered once in begetting us, do not let us renew her pangs. Rather let us expiate our faults by penance; let us remember that we are the children of sorrows, and that sinful pleasures are not for us. O Mary, Mother of God and of us, intercede with your Divine Son for us that we may always love His Cross and that we may be indeed your children; so that one day you may show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.

X

THE BLESSED VIRGIN'S LOVE OF GOD

By Bossuet

" My beloved to me and I to him " (Cant. ii. 16).

Let us to-day speak of Divine Love ; of its ineffable joys, of its passionate ardour, of its very ecstasy of sweetness, and of the effects produced by it upon Mary the Mother of God. I venture to submit that it was Love that gave and sustained her life, Love that caused her death, and Love also that was the factor in her glorious triumph. How difficult, you may say, to understand this seeming paradox ! If love gives life, how can it afterwards give death ? Love has indeed a vivifying power ; but it has also its languors and weariness, its faintness in which all natural forces succumb. It gives energy, animation, it sustains the heart ; but it also at another moment almost arrests its beating, retards the pulses, chills the veins. And beyond its strength which vivifies and its weakness which kills, it has its grandeur, its sublimity, its raptures, its magnificence.

But before I speak more of these things, I must warn you to banish from your minds every idea of profane love. And to enable you to do this I entreat you in the name of her who would not have consented to be a mother had she not at the same time been permitted

to remain a virgin ; I entreat you, I repeat, in her name to think only of that pure love by which the soul strives to reunite itself to the Author of its being. It will help you in your efforts if you imprint deeply upon your heart this fundamental truth : that love in its origin is due to God only and that it is an act of sacrilegious robbery to take it from Him and consecrate it to any other than Him.

Of that truth, too, we shall be convinced if we consider even for a moment what we mean when we speak of love. For do we not understand by that term an irresistible power, a constraining force, which has taken up its abode in us in order that it may draw us out of ourselves ; an indescribable something which dominates and subjugates our hearts, bringing them wholly under the influence of another, making us entirely dependent on that other and absolutely happy and satisfied in that dependence ? And is not this the condition of mind and feeling in which we ought to honour Him to Whom all empire belongs of right, and Who has undisputed sovereignty over all hearts ? This is the reason why He Himself, desiring to prescribe for us the worship we owe to Him, asks of us nothing less than a boundless love. *Thou shalt love,* He says, *the Lord thy God with thy whole strength* (Deut. vi. 5) ; in order to make us understand that love is the sole source of that legitimate adoration which the creature owes to his Creator, and the one tribute which we are bound to offer in recognition of His supreme claim over us.

Indeed it is quite certain that all true love tends towards adoration. If it is sometimes imperious in its demands, it is only that it may abase itself deeper and in a more entire subjection. It can never satisfy itself unless it is living in a state of absolute dependence

upon another. That is the very nature of love; and even poor earthly love speaks of nothing but adoration, homage, and dependence; from which we should understand (if indeed we were capable of understanding ourselves) that to deserve to be loved perfectly we must be something more than mere creatures. Having laid down that proposition and impressed upon your minds the necessity of belief in that holy doctrine, let us go on to speak, without diffidence, of the power and the marvellous effects of this love as exemplified in the Blessed Virgin.

It is born of the happy union of grace and nature, and it borrows from these its originators all that is most constraining in the one and in the other. Thus there was a truly marvellous bond between Jesus and Mary. *My Beloved is mine and I am His.* No other union, however intimate and dear, can possibly be like this; He is hers as a Saviour, that possession indeed being shared with us all, but He is hers as a Son, that is, He belongs to her as He belongs to the Eternal Father. This is an incommunicable mystery; "My Beloved is mine, my only Son," she can say, "and I am His; He has none but me in the world, He has no earthly father."

This love being so strong and binding these two hearts so closely and so tightly together, it seemed to follow as a necessity that when Mary saw her Son dying, she must die also. Nay more, that she must as it were die a thousand deaths, as often, that is, as she drew a living breath; since in her mind's eye she beheld Him always fainting, exhausted, drawing His last breath, bidding her His last farewell, for she lived always enshrouded in the mysteries of His death and burial. Her Beloved was thus to her *as a bundle of myrrh* (Cant.

i. 12); and the anguish caused by her love was deep and intense enough to have caused her death at any moment. That is why the Sacred Scriptures, always so strong in the simplicity of their expressions, compare this grief to a sharp and piercing sword—*Thine own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke ii. 35). Why then, seeing that she was thus pierced by a sword, did she not die? Because love kept her alive.

It is the property of love to give new life to the heart, a life which belongs solely to the object loved. The heart of man is naturally disposed to live for itself; but once let love take possession of that heart and all is changed. A new life then begins, a life which is lived simply for and in the beloved one. Now look at the divine Bride; she thinks only of her Bridegroom; she is wholly absorbed in that thought, all her attention is concentrated upon Him. By day and by night He is present to her even in sleep; she watches for Him: *I sleep, but my heart watches* (Cant. v. 2). Thus, though asleep, she keeps herself, in a manner, recollected in Him, so that at the first sound of His footfall, at the first whisper of His voice, she cries out in a rapture of delight: *It is the voice of my Beloved!* She had sought her couch that she might rest and slumber a little while; but the energy, the wakeful activity of love will not permit this. Since her Bridegroom is not resting, since she cannot find Him, she hurries out, uneasy, troubled, weary with her fruitless search but quite incapable of ceasing from this quest until she finds Him. She longs to hear everyone she meets speak to her of Him, yet at the same time she longs for them to be silent. She would fain speak of Him; yet nothing that she herself can say, nothing that any other creature can say, appears worthy of Him; the very love which

would unseal her lips, closes them again instantly, because no words are adequate to sing the praises, to show forth the beauty and the glory, of her Beloved.

Thus it was that the Blessed Virgin lived, sustained by the very might and ecstasy of her love. Her condition was indeed one continued state of sorrow, deep, heartrending, mortal; yet through it all there ran a thread of life, life born of love. Always she had before her eyes Jesus Christ crucified. For if the power of faith is such that St. Paul could write to the Galatians that *Jesus Christ had been crucified before their eyes* (Gal. iii. 1), how much more was this the case with the Blessed Virgin, who always had before her eyes the image of her Divine Son bruised and bleeding and cruelly disfigured by so many wounds? Having thus a continual remembrance of the Cross and Passion of our Divine Redeemer, she led a sorrowful and dying life, and could truly say with the Apostle: *I die daily* (1 Cor. xv. 31). But love came to her aid and sustained her fainting soul. One mighty desire to conform herself in all things to the will of her Beloved upheld her in all her languor and distress; and Jesus Christ only lived in her because she lived only in His love.

The martyrs were animated by an eager longing for suffering, which, while it excited their courage, sustained their strength and actually prolonged their life. Mary, that she might be conformed to the crucified life of Jesus Christ, having Him always crucified before her eyes, lived a life of continual suffering, and love sustained this life of suffering by its passionate desire to be configured to Jesus Christ, to be pierced with His nails, to be fastened to His cross. Mary only lived to suffer. *Stay me with flowers, strengthen me with fruits* (Cant. ii. 5). Her love, fainting beneath the burden of

her sorrow, sought some stay, some support; and what kind of support? Flowers and fruits. Yes, but they were the flowers of Calvary and the fruits of the Cross. Now the flowers of Calvary are sharp thorns, and the fruits of the Cross are bitter pains. This is the only stay which the fainting love of Mary seeks. The love of a Crucified Jesus makes her live this life; always she had before her eyes her Beloved suffering the agony of the Cross; always there sounded, not so much in her ears as in the very depths of her soul, that last faint expiring cry of Jesus, the cry that pierced that Mother's heart and might well have stopped its beating for ever.

But this love has another kind of life which enables us to live for the souls of others. Mary by her intense sufferings filled up that which was wanting in the measure of her Divine Son's Passion (Col. i. 24). It seems as if He had left her behind Him in the world on purpose to console His Church, His widowed desolate Bride, in those first days of her mourning and, at the same time, of her vigorous action. *The voice of the turtle is heard in our land: come back, come back, O my Beloved.* Such is the mournful cry of the Church calling back her dear Bridegroom Who has only been hers for such a little while. "This newly-made Bride," says St. Bernard, "seeing herself abandoned and deprived of her only hope, in proportion to the intensity of her sorrow at the absence of her Bridegroom must needs be eager and passionate in entreating Him to return to her. Her love and her need of Him urged her to tell her Beloved that she could not refrain from going to the place where they had parted and to which He had promised to return. If she entreats Him passionately to be swift in His return as the wild creatures in

their most rapid and most agile movements, it is only because to her eager desires nothing seems speedy enough and the slightest delay is insupportable to her." For how many long ages He had kept her waiting and longing! The Synagogue never saw Him in His risen beauty, but the Church saw Him, heard Him, touched Him; and then in a moment He vanished. Ah! what agony! She had left all, so that she might truly say to Him with St. Peter: *I have left all, to follow Thee* (Matt. xix. 27). He had taken her to be His Bride, with no dowry but her poverty and her destitution; then no sooner has He espoused Her than He dies; and though He rises from death glorious and immortal, it is only to return to the Heaven of Heavens whence He came, leaving His spotless Bride on earth in all her youthful, stainless loveliness, but widowed, desolate, without stay or support.

Mary was given to this widowed Church, to be her stay and the consolation of all the faithful upon earth. In all the members of that Church she beheld her Son. Her compassion was a prayer for all who suffered; her heart was united with the hearts of all the sighing troubled ones, helping them to cry for mercy; with the sick and wounded, helping them to implore relief and healing; with all charitable souls, urging them to hasten to the assistance and consolation of the needy and the afflicted. She was united with the Apostles in announcing the Gospel; with the Martyrs in sealing the testimony of that Gospel with their blood; and with all the faithful in observing its precepts, listening to its counsels, and imitating its examples.

In that state of distress which is caused by the departure of the Beloved, the only comfort and solace of the faithful soul is Holy Communion; for, being unable

to embrace Him in His unveiled truth and visible presence, she embraces Him in the veiled yet absolute verity of His Divine Sacrament. *I sat down under His shadow Whom I desired, and His fruit is sweet to my taste* (Cant. ii. 3). "His shadow," says St. Bernard, "is His Flesh, His shadow is Faith. Mary sheltered herself beneath the shadow of the Flesh of her Divine Son, and I take refuge beneath the shadow of His most holy Faith. And yet may I not say that I too am sheltered by His sacred Flesh, since I eat of it in the Divine Mysteries? The Bride desires, and with reason, to abide under the shadow of Him from Whom she will at the same time receive refreshment and nourishment. The other trees of the forest, although their shade is soothing, do not supply nourishment which is the support of life, nor do they bear the perpetual fruits of salvation. One alone, the Author of Life, can say to the Bride: *I am thy salvation.* Therefore does she especially desire to dwell under the shadow of Christ, because that shadow alone is a cool shade refreshing to the soul that has been scorched by the hot breath of vice, and a gentle influence filling that poor soul with the love of virtue."

Since then we are not able to enjoy the light, let us rest for a while in the shade, but let us be careful to seek out some tree that can afford us not only shade but also fruit, not only refreshment but nourishment. None but Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament can give us that. Let us then take our fainting, breathless love and lay it down to rest beneath His shadow. That love is weary because it cannot yet see the light nor embrace the truth itself. Well then, here is our only stay. Yet, alas! what a sorrowful stay! This Communion stimulates love rather than soothes it. O Mary,

Mother of God, you must die, your love has reached such a point that it cannot rest, save in the immensity of the bosom of God !

Earthly love is always plaintive ; it sighs out that it is fainting, dying, But it is not on that foundation I am going to build up my theory that love can deprive us of life ; no, I shall establish this truth upon the basis of one of the properties of Divine Love. This love brings with it such a terrible devastation and loneliness as nature is incapable of supporting ; such an absolute destruction of the whole man, such a profound annihilation of all our created being, that every sense is overwhelmed by it. For in order to go to God, we must so denude ourselves that nothing is left for us to retain : and the deeply seated root of this separation is the terrible jealousy of God Who will reign alone in the soul and Who cannot suffer any but Himself to dwell in a heart which He condescends to love, so impossible is it for this Divine Lover to share that heart with any rival. There is no more striking exemplification of this jealousy than the story of the Sisters of Bethany as related in the Gospel. If Martha was busy, eager, hurried, over-anxious, it was in the service of our Divine Lord and for Him only ; yet He is jealous because she is busying herself with what is *for* Him, instead of being wholly and solely occupied *with* Him as was Magdalen. *Martha, Martha,* He says, *thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary* (Luke x. 41–42). From this then we may comprehend in a measure the terrible solitude a jealous God demands in the soul. It is His desire that all that is not Himself within it, should be laid waste, destroyed, annihilated ; and yet, as regards what is of Himself, He hides Him-

self and leaves no vantage point, so that the soul, detached on the one side from everything and, on the other, finding no means of possessing God effectively, falls into a state of weakness, languor, incredible exhaustion, which, when love has reached perfection, ends in the paralysis of every fibre of our being, and in death. This destruction, this annihilation, is the effect of the Cross.

It reduces everything into a unity so simple, so dominating, yet so imperceptible, that all nature is astounded at it. Listen to the language of your own heart on this subject, when it is told that from henceforth it must desire none but God. Suddenly it feels itself to be plunged into a most terrible solitude, cast into the midst of an arid desert, torn from all that it loves. To have no longer any one but God! What a desolation! What shall we do? Of what shall we think? What object in life, what pleasure, what occupation, is left to us? This unity which is so simple, seems to us a positive death; because in it we see none of those delights, none of that variety that charms the senses, none of those primrose paths along which they wandered with such easy, unrestrained liberty, in fact none of those agreeable things without which life would be insupportable.

But those are as it were mere negations; there is something more than that, something which deals the death-blow; and this is the fact that the heart thus stripped of all superfluous love is drawn with an incredible force towards the one thing needful, and, not finding it, dies of disappointed longing. *The foolish man doth not understand these things, and the sensual man doth not perceive them; but we speak wisdom among the perfect, and explain the mysteries of the spirit to the*

spiritual (1 Cor. ii. 6, 13, 14). I say, therefore, that the soul, being loosed from the bond of every earthly anxiety and eagerness, is attracted, and hurried along with the swiftness of a supernatural impetus, towards God, the Eternal, the Infinite ; and this is what gives the death-blow ; for, being torn away, forcibly detached from all sensible objects, at the same time the object that it is seeking is so simple and yet so inaccessible that it can never approach it. The soul only sees it by faith, that is to say, she does not see it at all ; she only embraces it in the midst of shadows through an encompassing medium of clouds and mists, in truth she really gets no hold of it at all. Then it is that baffled love begins to turn against itself, and becomes insupportable to itself. The body hinders it, the soul hinders it ; it hinders and perplexes itself ; it knows not what to do or what is to become of it.

Oh, union of two hearts which desire to be no longer two but one only ; O hearts, sighing for unity, it is not in yourselves that you can find it. Come, O centre of all hearts, source of unity ! nay more, Unity Itself ! but come with Thy simplicity more dominating, more destructive than all the thunderbolts and scourges with which Thine almighty power arms itself. Come and make desolation in the soul, by claiming all that is in it for Thine own, by merging all its powers, all its affections, into Thyself, so that Thou alone mayest be and live and reign in and over those hearts whose unity is Thy throne, Thy temple, Thine altar, and makes one body of which Thou art the life.

What is Thy mission, Thy purpose, Thy work, O Jesus Christ, O God made Man ? Of what avail the nails, the thorns, the Cross ? Of what avail Thy death and burial ? Is not their aim and intention to destroy,

to crucify, to bury in Thyself and with Thyself all things? Thou hast no more use for all these instruments of Thy Passion, all this gloomy ritual of Thy Death. Thy Church and the souls whom Thou hast redeemed, ask of Thee these instruments, so sad, so sombre, yet so salutary even because they are so sombre. These souls indeed need that for which Thou hast no longer any use except to bestow it upon them; yes, the members of Thy Mystical Body need Thy solemn legacy of suffering and death.

O Bridegroom, so beautiful in Thy blood-stained garments! give to Thy spouses, the baptized who in the unity of the Church make one only Bride, give to them those weapons so destructive and so wonder-working, so that they may be wedded to Thee by the mystery of Thy Cross, their poverty and self-renunciation being their only dowry; for Thou art so rich in Thyself, and all Thy wealth in the creature is the poverty and the nothingness of that creature. Oh, destroy, then, annihilate the souls Thou hast redeemed; annihilate them by the mystery of Thy Cross, so as to render them worthy to be annihilated by the mystery of Thy Glory, when God Who is now in Thee reconciling all things to Himself shall be in Thee consummating all things perfectly in one.

That is the mystery of unity for which are sighing and longing all exiled souls now mourning by the waters of Babylon when they remember Sion. Oh, mystery of unity, which is always operating and advancing day by day along a way of sorrows, a martyrdom of deed and will, past the power of human speech to express, but which will in the end be consummated by a peace which will be God Himself! Ah! what a change! what violence! what anguish

of travail! For God does not unbind, He tears asunder; He does not bend, He breaks; He does not separate so much as He destroys and lays waste. Ah, dearest Lord, can it be that thou art cruel in Thy love? Nay, for Thou wilt at last destroy what is destroying us.

Yet what after all do I know of this Way of Sorrows, what of those struggles, those agonies? Only those who have experienced them can rightly speak of them. For myself, I should not dare to do so or to attempt to fathom them if it were not that I want to try and give you some faint idea of the love of the Blessed Virgin, that love which animated her during the days of her exile and the captivity of her mortal life. No, the very Angels cannot understand or rightly explain the anguish Mary suffered during her separation from her Beloved, and the swiftness of her soul's flight to Him. If ever there was a creature imbued with the spirit of the Cross, the spirit of Christian self-renunciation, it was Blessed Mary. Thus it followed that she was always fainting and dying, always in mortal anguish, calling upon her Beloved and saying to Him, like the Bride in the Canticles: *Return, O my Beloved, be like a young roe or a hart upon the mountain* (Cant. ii. 17). It is in vain that her Divine Son says to her: *Yet a little while! a little while and you shall not see Me, and again a little while and you shall see Me* (John xvi.). Ah, dear Lord, what art Thou saying? Dost Thou consider that Thou art speaking to a heart that loves? and dost Thou count as nothing so many years of loss and separation? Years, do I say? Nay, to those who love Thee truly, every moment of such separation is an eternity; for Thou art eternity itself, and we

no longer reckon moments when we know that at each moment we lose a whole eternity. And yet Thou sayest : *Yet a little while !* This is not to console love, but rather to outrage it ; it is insulting its sorrows and making a mockery of its impatient agony, its very ecstasy of suffering.

Do not, I beseech you, seek any other cause for the Blessed Virgin's death. Her love being as it was so intense, so fervent, so strong, it did not breathe a single sigh which might not have broken every bond that chained her soul to that mortal body ; it did not even form a regret which might not have dissolved all the harmony existing between that soul and body ; it did not send up to Heaven one passionate desire which might not have carried that spotless soul up with it on wings of fervent longing.

O Jesus, our Saviour and our God, kindle in our hearts, by the same spirit of impatience and holy longing, the fire of Thy Divine Love ! And since in Mary it sprang from that intimate union that existed between herself and Thee, do Thou so satisfy our souls with Thy holy Mysteries, do Thou so dwell within us by the participation of Thy most precious Body and Blood, that we, henceforth living more in Thee than in ourselves, may breathe no other desire than that of being perfected with Thee in the glory Thou hast prepared for us.

The holy and blessed soul of Mary carried with it, we know, her immaculate body, by an anticipated resurrection, straight up to Heaven. The glories of this Assumption were twofold ; for it was the triumphal ascent of soul and body, the latter being made glorious by the reflection of the soul's transcendent glory.

Truly, *a woman clothed with the sun, having the moon beneath her feet, her head encircled with stars* (Apoc. xii. 1).

What more can I say? Could any words of mine enhance the magnificence of this picture? We have seen that Mary died of love, and now we see her triumphing through love. It is enough; only I would remind you that to her it belongs to raise our hearts, it is she who bids us say, *Sursum corda.* It is the teaching of the great St. Thomas Aquinas that those who on earth have had the most vehement desire to possess God, will have the highest place in glory. The more tightly strung the bow, the greater the force and swiftness of the arrow's flight and the more deeply does it pierce the target at which it was aimed. So too the faithful soul will, if I may so speak, penetrate the deeper into the very essence of God, the aim and only object of all its hopes, the greater the impetuosity of its desires.

But if the love of Mary was indeed so fervent and so impetuous, what must be the closeness, the intimacy of her union with Him Who was the sole object of her heart's affections and of her desires? Who can express the glory with which she was invested on entering into the joy of her Beloved? Her triumph is no vain display; the power given to her corresponds with the dignity of her person, with the perfection of her love, and with the sublime height of her exaltation. The nearer she is to the Throne of her Divine Son, the greater is her power to obtain a favourable acceptance of our prayers and to procure for us the help that we implore. What can a Son refuse to a Mother so tenderly loved? What cannot love so mighty as that with which her soul is on fire, gain for us? How can

she fail to be deeply interested in children who cost her beloved Son so much and whom their own sorrows render so dear to her? Well, there is but one way of securing Mary's prayers for us, and of inclining Jesus Christ to listen favourably to those prayers. Listen, she is speaking to us; she tells us what that way is: *Whatsoever He shall tell you to do, do it* (John ii. 5).

XI

THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN[1]

By Bossuet

"Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?" (Cant. viii. 5).

Through all the mysteries of the Christian Faith there runs a marvellous connecting chain, uniting one with another. The mystery of the Assumption is, in this way, most closely linked with that of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. For if Blessed Mary once received her Divine Son, it is right and fitting that the same Saviour should in His turn receive Mary; that as He did not disdain to come down from Heaven to take up His abode in her, He should in due time lift her up to Himself that He might make her enter into His glory. Wonder not, then, to see the Mother of God restored to life again, beautiful and radiant, and triumphing over death and the grave with all the pomp and majesty of a royal conqueror. Do not

[1] It is the traditional teaching of the Church that after her death Mary's body was assumed, or taken up, by God into Heaven, there to be reunited with her soul. She now is, soul and body, with her Son and God in Paradise; her body had not to remain on earth to await the General Resurrection at Christ's second coming. The doctrine of the Assumption is dealt with by Cardinal Newman in one of his Discourses to Mixed Congregations. See also Richard Crashaw's poem on "The Glorious Assumption of our Blessed Lady."

wonder, I repeat ; for Jesus, to Whom this Immaculate Virgin gave life, now on this day gratefully repays the gift ; and, as it appertains to the very essence of the Godhead to give magnificently as no mortal can ever give, so it follows naturally that the Divine Saviour Who had received from His Blessed Mother only the poor dying life which He deigned to share with His creatures, should in His munificence bestow on her the treasure of a glorious immortality. Thus are those two mysteries linked indissolubly together ; and in order to draw the links closer the Angels take part in both, rejoicing to-day with Mary to behold this completion of the mystery which they first announced.

Heaven, as well as earth, has its solemnities and its triumphs, its ceremonies, its magnificent spectacles, its pomp and circumstance ; or to speak more truly, earth borrows those titles to lend a fictitious splendour to its own vain, illusive display. The reality of those things is, in truth, only to be found in the glorious feasts of our heavenly country, the City of the Saints, Jerusalem the Golden. And doubtless the exaltation of the Blessed Virgin to the throne destined for her by her Divine Son, will through all eternity be kept as a feast day of extraordinary splendour ; if indeed in that vast, limitless, unchanging eternity, days (which are the measurements of time only) will continue to be.

In order to give you some idea of the glories of Mary's Assumption into Heaven, I might represent to you the thronging hosts of Angels uniting with all the Blessed in a jubilant hymn of glad welcome and acclamation ; or I might even rise to higher flights, and show you the Immaculate Virgin presented

by her Divine Son before the Throne of the Eternal Father to receive from His hand a crown of immortal glory. But no; this spectacle, at once the wonder and admiration of Heaven and earth, is too Divine, too far beyond the grasp of our poor intelligence. Moreover I am bound, in the exercise of my sacred ministry, to set before you not only what is great and splendid, but also what may serve as an example for you. I therefore intend to show you Blessed Mary assumed into Heaven, followed, surrounded, escorted (so to speak) only by her virtues; yet so dazzling, so resplendent are those virtues that nothing more is wanting to the glory of this triumphal progress. It is indeed the virtues of our Queen which are the object most worthy of our contemplation in this her glorious entrance into Heaven; they prepared the way for it, they adorn it with all its splendour, they make up its consummation and perfection.

Before Mary could enter into her glory, it was necessary first to strip from her our poor mortality which like some strange garment clothed her beautiful soul; next, to invest that soul and that immaculate body with a glorious immortality as with a royal robe of adornment; then, finally, to place her all radiant and transcendent in loveliness upon her throne, far above Cherubim and Seraphim and all creatures. This is the mystery of to-day's Festival; and I affirm that three of the virtues of our Queen and Mother were the motive power that accomplished it. If she must be released from the prison of this mortal body, Divine Love will do the work. Then, by the power of her spotless Purity, she will be clothed with the heavenly garment of immortal radiance. And when Divine Love and Virgin Purity have thus made her ready

for her glorious entrance into the Court of the King of Kings, her incomparable Humility will put the finishing touch to this imposing ceremony by placing the Queen of Angels on her Throne, there to be revered by them to all eternity.

Nature and grace concur in establishing the immutable decree that we must die. It is the law of nature that all that is mortal must pay its tribute to death, and grace has not exempted man from this common necessity. Since the Son of God designed to conquer death by death itself, He laid it down that in order to escape from death we must pass through that enemy's hands, that we must go down into the grave so that we may come forth from it with life and renewed vigour, that we must all die once that we may wholly divest ourselves of the casements of this poor mortality. Therefore we must not forget that Mary truly died. Before attaining to her glorious triumph she had to leave behind her in the grave all that was mortal in her.

But do not let us imagine that while subject to this universal law of nature the Blessed Virgin died in the same way as ordinary mortals die. No ; in Mary all was, and is, supernatural. A miracle gave her Divine Son to her, a miracle is to restore Him to her again ; and her life full of miracles is at last to be closed by a death wholly divine. What was it that brought about this death so supernatural and so beautiful ? Love will do this, love maternal and divine ; this it is which will carry up the soul of Mary, and, breaking the bonds of the flesh which are hindering her reunion with her beloved Son, will bring together again in Heaven what only the most violent wrench can separate. Let us, as far as our poor intelligence will

permit, try to apprehend what is the nature of the Blessed Virgin's love, what are its transports, what are the darts in its quiver, what the wounds with which they pierce the heart.

A holy Bishop (Amadeus of Lausanne) gives us a very exalted and beautiful idea of this love when he says: "The love of Mary was formed by the union of two loves into one; for she rendered to her Son the love she owed to a God, and to her God the love she owed to a Son." Nothing greater, nothing stronger, nothing more sublime in all the range of language, could have been found to express the love of the Blessed Virgin; as this holy Bishop's words imply, nature and grace concur in making upon the heart of Mary the very deepest possible impression. There is nothing stronger or more constraining than the love which nature bestows for a son, and that which grace bestows for a God. These two loves are, in truth, two vast abysses the depth of which we cannot fathom, the extent of which we cannot comprehend. Here we may say with the Psalmist: *Deep calleth unto deep* (Ps. xxi. 8); since, in order to form the love of the Blessed Virgin, all that is most tender in nature and what is most powerful in grace must be blended together. Nature must needs have a share in it, because this love embraced a son; and grace must act in it, because this love had for its object a God. But what passes imagination is the fact that ordinary nature and grace are not sufficient for the formation of this marvellous love; because it is not within the range of nature's powers to find in a God a son; nor can grace, ordinary grace at least, give what is needed in order to love in a son the Eternal God Himself. We must then take yet a loftier flight.

Yes, we must rise above nature and grace, and seek in the very heart of the Eternal Father the well-spring of this love. And for this reason. Mary, the Mother of the Divine Son, shares the possession of Him with God the Father ; *that which shall be born of you* (said the Angel to her) *shall be called the Son of God* (Luke i. 35). Thus she is united with the Eternal Father by becoming the Mother of His only Son, this joint possession of and relationship to the Divine Son being only effected by and dependent on the manner in which He was conceived by her.

But we must rise higher yet, into a region whose atmosphere seems almost too pure, too rarefied for our poor thoughts. We must consider how and whence such an honour as this came to Mary, how she conceived the true Son of God. She conceived Him not in any ordinary manner, for she as a creature could only have conceived a creature like herself. That she might be able to conceive a God it was necessary (says the Evangelist) that the power of the Most High should overshadow her (Luke i. 35), so covering her with His own virtue and infusing into her His own fruitfulness, that in this way Mary is associated with the generation of the Eternal Word. More than this. The Everlasting Father Who condescended to give to the Immaculate Virgin His Son to be her son, in order to perfect this work kindled in her pure heart a ray or spark of that Divine Love which He Himself bears towards that only Son Who is the brightness of His glory and the express image of His substance. Now then, what is the source of Mary's love ? The heart of God has poured itself into her own ; the love of the Eternal Father and the love of the Immaculate Mother have one and the same source,

for it is the source from which her Divine Son was given to her. And now, poor human reason, what have you to say to this mysterious communication? Will you even pretend to understand the union of Jesus and Mary, since it has in it something of that perfect unity which exists between the Father and the Son? Or will you attempt to define what is that maternal love which emanates from so sublime a source, and which is neither more nor less than an overflow of the love of the Eternal Father for His only Son? And since you are incapable of understanding either the strength or the ardour of that love, how could you hope to form any idea of its emotions, its ecstasies? Nothing can equal the greatness of the effort made by Mary to reunite herself to Jesus, nor was there ever a vehemence of anguish like that by which her heart was torn at the moment of her separation from her Beloved.

After the triumphant Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, Blessed Mary still for some time remained living upon earth. It is beyond my power to tell you what during that period were her daily occupations, and what were the merits gained by her during that period of exile. If to love Jesus and to be loved by Him fills the soul with heavenly benedictions, what rivers of grace and blessedness must have inundated the soul of Mary! What mere human words can describe the ardour of that mutual love, in which all that is most tender in nature and all that is most powerful in grace was blended together! To imagine what was the deep glowing intensity of that fire of love which was ever burning in the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, each kindling the flames of the other continually afresh; to imagine this, I say, passes the

power of the Seraphim. Measure, if you can, by her love her holy impatience to be reunited to her Divine Son. We know that because the Son of God desired nothing so much as that baptism of blood which was to wash away our iniquities, He longed with an incredible longing—a fervent longing that burned like a consuming fire in His Sacred Heart—for the accomplishment of that work of Redemption. And think you that if the Divine Son was thus impatient to die for us, the Immaculate Mother would feel no impatience to live with Him? If the great Apostle, St. Paul, eagerly desired to break the fetters of his mortal body which chained him to earth, that he might seek his Divine Master at the right hand of the Eternal Father (Phil. i. 21–23), what, think you, must have been the yearning of the Sacred Mother's heart? When the young Tobias was absent from his mother for a year only, we read that her grief was inconsolable. What then must Mary's grief have been, from whose sight and companionship death had snatched not only her Son but her Lord and her God? As one by one she saw the faithful—St. Stephen, for example, and many others—passing away from this world, we may fairly picture her grief and catch the echo of her sweet lamenting words: "Alas, my Son," we seem to hear her say, "why do You leave me to the last? I desire nothing else but to die soon, very soon, so that I may embrace You on the throne of Your glory. Only, only let my love do its work; then it will soon have released my soul from this mortal body and carried me on its wings to You in Whom alone I live!"

Do not weary yourselves in trying to find any other cause than this for the death of the Blessed Virgin. So intense, so ardent, so mighty was her love that one

sigh breathed by it had strength sufficient to break every earthly bond, one regret was able to destroy all the harmony of her being, one longing desire, sent up by that love to Heaven, would have had impetus enough to waft the soul of Mary with it to the Paradise of bliss. I said indeed that the death of Mary was miraculous; I ought rather to say that her death was not the miracle but its cessation; the continuing miracle had been that Mary was able to live separated from her Beloved.

But shall I tell you what put an end at last to this miracle, how it came to pass that love gave her her death-blow? Was it, think you, some sudden quickening of a consuming flame, some increased activity of desire, some violent wrench of emotion, which tore this pure soul out of its mortal shell? No, I think not; and, if I may venture to speak as I think, I should attribute this close of the Blessed Virgin's life, not to any violent or extraordinary cause, but simply and solely to the perfection to which her love had grown. For as this Divine love reigned in her heart and occupied all her thoughts, meeting no obstacle or impediment in that pure region where God ruled alone, it increased day by day by activity, being perfected by its own desires, multiplying itself by itself; so that at last, always extending farther and farther, it grew so limitless in its perfection that Earth was no longer capable of containing it. "Go, my son," said the Grecian King Philip to Alexander, "extend your conquests far and wide; my kingdom is too small to hold you." O Love of the Blessed Virgin! your perfection is too sublime, it cannot any longer be restrained in a mortal body, your fires flame too brightly to be smothered by the dust of which

that body is composed. Leave earth and time behind you; soar up into Eternity, shine and burn like a consecrated lamp before the Throne of God, losing yourself in His immensity which is alone capable of containing you.

Thus, without effort or pain, the Immaculate Mother rendered up her holy and blessed soul into the hands of her Divine Son. There was no need for her love to make any special exertion in order to effect this. As the slightest shaking detaches ripe fruit from the tree, as a flame springs up and darts to its centre, so this blessed soul was no sooner gathered than it was instantly transported to Heaven. The Blessed Virgin died from an ecstasy of Divine love, and her soul was carried up to Heaven on a cloud of holy desires. *Who is she,* cry out the Angels, *who cometh up as a pillar of smoke of aromatic spices of myrrh and frankincense?* (Cant. iii. 6). Could any comparison be more suitable, more perfect than this, more appropriate to the serene beauty of this happy tranquil death? The sweet-smelling smoke that we see rising from a compound of delicate perfumes, is not extracted from this compound by force or driven up by violence; a gentle temperate heat softly detaches it and turns it into a subtle vapour which rises up higher and higher as of itself. Thus it was that the soul of Mary was separated from the body; there was no violent disturbance of natural forces; a Divine heat gently detached it from its mortal coil, and then lifted it borne on a cloud of heavenly longings, up and up, into the very presence of the Beloved. This was Mary's Triumphal Car, and Love built it with his own hands.

Yet not for long will Mary remain a disembodied

spirit ; soon, very soon, as we shall see, holy purity breathed life into her spotless body.

Mary's sacred body, the throne of chastity, the temple of Incarnate Wisdom, the organ of the Holy Ghost, the seat of the Power of the Most High, could not be suffered to remain in the grave ; her triumph would have been incomplete had it been accomplished without including in its mystery her holy flesh, which had been, so to speak, the very source of her glory. How radiantly beautiful was that virginal flesh ! How admirable are the three wonders wrought therein by the power of Mary's sacred Virginity ! By it this pure flesh is preserved from corruption ; by it a heavenly influence is attracted and descends upon that flesh, making it live again before the resurrection day has come ; and by it a light Divine is shed over that flesh, investing it with the glory which we are contemplating to-day.

First, then, let us think of holy chastity as a Divine balm preserving the body of Mary from corruption. The more deeply we meditate upon this point, the more firmly convinced shall we be of the perfection of that virginal purity. Our Saviour Jesus Christ being, according to the flesh, so closely united to the Blessed Virgin, this most intimate union must have been accompanied by a special conformity with one another. Jesus sought for one like to Himself ; and this is why the Spouse of Virgins desired to have a Virgin Mother, so as to establish this resemblance as the foundation of their union. This being granted, you may well believe that we cannot form any adequate idea of Mary's purity, that it was no mere ordinary virtue and cannot be ranked with the purity of any

other living creature. No, we shall never be able to form a just estimate of its perfection until we realize that this purity was the factor of the perfect integrity of mind and body which was a distinguishing characteristic of the Virgin Mother. This it was which made the great St. Thomas Aquinas say that an extraordinary grace shed over her a most abundant and heavenly dew which not only tempered, as in others of the elect, but actually extinguished all the fire of concupiscence. That is to say, not only those evil deeds which are the conflagration kindled by it, not only the sinful desires which are the flames it throws out, nor only the wrong inclinations which are as a continual smouldering heat nourished by it, but even the furnace itself—what theology calls *fomes peccati* —was utterly destroyed in her. Thus her virginity and her perfect conformity with Jesus Christ had, in putting far from her and utterly extinguishing the furnace of concupiscence and thereby destroying at the same time the very principle of corruption, secured that her flesh should never see corruption. For you must not allow yourselves to regard corruption (as the reasonings of medical science would have us do) as merely the natural outcome of our physical composition and of all the mingled elements that go to make up the human body. No, we must lift our thoughts higher, and believe, as the principles of Christianity would have us believe, that what binds the flesh to the irrevocable law of corruption is the fact that it is an incentive to evil, a source of wicked desires, that it is, as St. Paul says, *sinful flesh* (Rom. viii. 3). Such flesh must be destroyed, even in the elect, because in the condition of sinful flesh it is not worthy to be reunited to a blessed soul or to enter

the Kingdom of God which *flesh and blood cannot possess* (1 Cor. xv. 50). It must undergo a change in its original form, in order to be renewed; it must lose its first state of being, so as to be ready to receive a second from the hand of God. Our flesh must be reduced to dust because it has lent itself to the service of sin; but the flesh of the sinless Mary, being absolutely pure, must in consequence be incorruptible.

And it was for the same reason that the flesh of Mary was endowed with the gift of immortality, by what may be called an anticipated resurrection. Though God has appointed a fixed time for the General Resurrection of the dead, there were special reasons which induced Him to anticipate that time in favour of the Blessed Virgin. The sun brings forth the fruits of the earth only in their proper seasons, yet in some favoured spots the soil is so well cultivated that its produce is earlier. So too there are in the garden of our Heavenly Bridegroom trees that come rapidly to their perfect maturity; and there was in the holy flesh of Mary a property that made it bring forth prematurely the fruits of immortality. Her maiden purity attracts to her a special influence; her conformity with Christ prepares her to receive a more speedy effect of His quickening power than would otherwise have been her share. And it may indeed well be that she attracts His virtue since she attracted the very Virtue-Giver Himself. He came down from Heaven and took up His abode in this flesh, because He delighted in its purity; He loved it so well that He remained enshrined in it for nine months, so absolutely incorporated with it as (in the words of Tertullian) to take root in it. This flesh which He

loved so dearly He will not leave in the grave, but He will transport it robed in immortal glory to Heaven.

Holy Virginity will also play its part in giving Mary this robe of glory. Jesus Christ, in His Gospel, represents the glory of risen bodies in these beautiful words: *They will be as the angels of God* (Matt. xxii. 30); and this is why Tertullian, speaking of the risen body, calls it *angelicized flesh.* Now of all the Christian virtues, the one that has most power to produce this glorious effect is holy purity; that it is which makes angels upon earth; and of this St. Augustine is thinking when he says of it that "whilst in the flesh it has something which is not of the flesh," and which partakes more of the angel than of the mortal. That which makes angels in this lower world, may surely make them in the life to come; and indeed I may assert that this beautiful virtue of chastity will have a share in clothing with glory the risen bodies even of us poor creatures. What then must be the radiant splendour which enfolded and glorified the body of Mary, whose purity far surpasses that of the very Seraphim! The Holy Scriptures are fain to seek out extraordinary comparisons to bring to our mind's eye some faint picture of this marvellous glory. Since earth fails to supply fitting imagery, the inspired writers summon to their aid the glorious lights of the heavens. They place the moon beneath her feet, the dazzling stars around her head, and the very sun itself wraps her in its radiant splendour—*A woman clothed with the sun* (Apoc. xii. 7). Yes, all this imagery is employed to symbolize the beauty and splendour that must adorn the risen body of the Mother of God.

And now Humility stretches out a hand, and comes forward to place Mary on her throne. For, as humility was the sole factor in the triumph of Jesus Christ, it must be also in that of Mary. In truth her glory would have given her no joy had she entered into it by any other road than the one which her Son had chosen for Himself.

You are not ignorant of the truth that it is the chief characteristic of humility that it impoverishes itself and strips itself of all its own advantages, yet at the same time, by some marvellous contradiction, the more it despoils itself the richer it grows, securing to itself everything that it casts away. Nothing so well describes it as the beautiful words of St. Paul: *As having nothing and yet possessing all things* (Col. i. 19).

Mary possessed three precious gifts: she had an exalted dignity; she had an incomparable purity of soul and body; and, what is infinitely beyond all other treasures, she possessed Jesus Christ, she had a beloved Son in Whom *dwelt all fulness* (Col. i. 19). Yet her profound humility will, to a certain extent, strip her of all these advantages. She who, as the Mother of God, is by that dignity raised far above all others, takes her place among the poor and lowly on earth, ranking as a servant. She who is separated from all other women by her immaculate purity, actually identifies herself with sinners by submitting herself to the rite of Purification. But more than this, she even loses her Divine Son on Calvary. I do not mean only that she loses Him by seeing Him die a cruel death; but she loses Him because in a manner He ceases to be her Son, when, substituting another for Himself, He says to her: *Woman, behold thy son*

(John xix. 26). It would seem as though the Saviour no longer recognizes Mary as His Mother ; He calls her *Woman*, not *Mother*. But this term has its mystical meaning. Jesus Himself is in humiliation, His holy Mother must be in the same. Jesus has a God for His Father, and Mary has a God for her Son. This Divine Saviour has lost His Father and calls upon Him only as His God ; Mary must in like manner lose her Son, He no longer gives her the title of Mother. But what is still more humiliating for her, He gives her another son : *Behold*, He says, *thy son*. What could have moved our Divine Lord to utter those words ? " Jesus, being about to pass," says St. Paulinus, " from that condition of human weakness by which He was born of a woman, does what ? He delegates His filial duties, He gives St. John as a son to Mary, He bequeaths to a mortal that treasure of natural piety." What an exchange (cries St. Bernard), John for Jesus, the servant for the Master, the son of Zebedee for the Son of God ! Mary has lost everything ; humility has stripped her of all : *as having nothing*. But look a little deeper, a little further rather, and you will see that this humility restores it all again with interest : *yet possessing all things*.

O Mother of Jesus Christ ! because you called yourself a handmaid, to-day humility prepares a throne for you ; mount up to this place which is so highly exalted, and as the Queen of Heaven receive our veneration. O Virgin, all holy and innocent, purer than the sunbeams, since you condescended to submit to the law for sinners you now are to be exalted by that very humility ; you now will be the advocate of all sinners, their refuge and their hope next after Christ—*Refugium peccatorum*. You had indeed lost

your Son, it seemed as if He had quitted you, leaving you to sigh and mourn in this land of exile; but the Divine Son is now eager to resume those rights which He only yielded for a little while to St. John. Yes, dear Mother, I see Him stretching out His sacred arms to you, while all the Court of Heaven are watching their Queen as she ascends full of rapture and *leaning upon her Beloved* (Cant. viii. 5).

Yes, Blessed Virgin, you are indeed supported by this Beloved Son; it is from Him that all your glory flows; He is the foundation of all your merits. The very heavens seem to unite in glad acclaim, the music of the spheres in its hitherto changeless harmony breaks forth to-day into a new melody in honour of the ascending Queen. If my poor reasoning, if indeed the imagination of any mortal may dare to blend itself with those divine harmonies, I feel that we are reminded of the prophecy of Moses, and know that to-day he sees in the Blessed Virgin's Assumption its fulfilment: *A star shall rise out of Jacob and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel* (Num. xxiv. 17). Isaiah, too, in a sort of ecstasy, inspired by the Spirit of God, cries out: *Behold that Virgin who was to conceive and bear a Son* (Isa. vii. 14). Ezechiel recognizes in her that closed door that was never again to be opened, *because the Lord the God of Israel had entered in by it* (Ezech. xliv. 2). And there, in the midst of all those prophets and seers, the sweet singer of Israel, the Royal David, tunes his heavenly harp and chants these triumphant words: *On Thy right hand stood the Queen in vesture of gold, wrought about with variety. This King's daughter is indeed all glorious within, but she is also outwardly adorned with beauty and splendour. After her shall virgins be brought unto the King. With*

joy and gladness shall they be brought unto Him (Ps. xliv.). And the Virgin of Virgins will keep those happy souls hushed and silent while she herself pours forth her rapturous canticle: *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall called me blessed* (Luke i. 46–48).

XII

THE VICE OF IMPURITY[1]

By Massillon

"Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. . . . The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury" (Gal. v. 16, 19).

The injunction which the Apostle gives to the Galatians in the words of my text, induces me to address you on a subject which, if necessity did not require it, ought not so much as to be named among Christians. But in these days, when this detestable vice has extended its ravages over the whole Christian world, desolated the fair inheritance of Jesus, and pervaded the inmost recesses of that Church which had formerly banished it from its precincts, you will readily allow that it is the duty of the pastor to raise his voice, and openly to oppose its progress.. I will therefore display before you the pernicious effects which it entails on its unhappy victims; I will show you that no vice removes the sinner to a greater distance from God; that no vice more completely closes every avenue to repentance; and that no vice makes the sinner more insupportable to himself, or more contemptible in the eyes of men.

Do Thou purify my lips, O God; and in my descrip-

[1] This sermon, as given here, is an extract from the first part of Massillon's sermon on the Prodigal Son.

tion of the excesses of the voluptuous, inspire me with expressions which may leave untarnished the beauty of a virtue whose reign I hope to promote in their souls. Inspire me, I beseech Thee ; for the deeper the world is engulfed in the mire of impurity, the more are circumspection and delicacy demanded of us when we dare to draw the veil and expose the vileness of this besetting sin.

The vice of impurity, in the first place, opens an immense abyss between the sinner and God—an abyss which, in all probability, will never again be closed up. In all other vicious habits there exists some point of union, some means of intercourse between the sinner and God ; but the vice of impurity destroys every connection ; it pollutes the body, it clouds the understanding, it creates a disgust for the exercises of piety, and removes the unhappy soul to an immense distance from everything that is good.

Yes, it pollutes the body ; it profanes the temple of God ; it degrades the members of Jesus into slaves of uncleanness ; it defiles a flesh which has been nourished by the Body and Blood of the Son of God, and consecrated by the waters of baptism, and destined to become immortal and to partake of the spiritual properties that distinguished the Body of Jesus after His resurrection ; it defiles a flesh which will be deposited in the holy places, and which, mingling with the ashes of virgins and martyrs, will await under the Altar of the Lamb the glorious day of His manifestation ; it defiles a body which is more holy than this temple in which the glory of the Lord resides, more worthy to be possessed with honour than the vessels of the sanctuary which are consecrated by the tremendous Mysteries they contain.

What an insurmountable barrier, then, does this

ignominious vice oppose to the sinner's conversion! Can the God of sanctity, in Whose sight the celestial spirits are unclean, banish far enough from Him a flesh thus abused and defiled? His purity is such that He would be humbled by a communication with a creature that had preserved his original substance spotless and undefiled; and can the sinner expect that He will stoop so low as to hold a correspondence with dust and ashes that are defiled by the most execrable impurities?

In addition to this, it clouds the understanding and renders the sinner incapable of making those salutary reflections which are the forerunners of a change of life. Men who before were prudent and enlightened, refuse to listen to the dictates of wisdom, reject the rules of discretion and justice, and, hurried away by the impetuous fury of their passion, are equally unmindful of what they owe to others and of what they owe to themselves. Amnon, the son of David, dares to violate the purity of a sister, and loses both the crown and his life. The wife of Potiphar is enamoured of her slave Joseph, and, regardless of the distinction of her rank, of her conjugal duties, and of the consequences that may ensue, pursues her passion with the wildest fury. David commits adultery, and his intellectual faculties are immediately degraded; he is unmoved by the fidelity of Urias, and coolly delivers him up to the sword; he discontinues his harmonious praises of the Law of the Lord, and is insensible of his ingratitude to a God Who had raised him out of the dust and exalted him to the throne of Juda. The two old judges, hurried away by their impure passion for the chaste Susanna, are not restrained either by the prudence which generally attends grey hairs, by the

consideration of their venerable character, or by the exalted rank that they hold among their countrymen.

It, moreover, creates in the soul of its unhappy votary an insuperable aversion from spiritual things, and a perfect indifference to everything that is good. The few faint desires of returning to God which from time to time shed their glimmering light on the mind, are overpowered and extinguished. The heart revolts at the idea of prayer, and shrinks back with horror at the sight of the difficulties and self-denials which obstruct the paths of piety and repentance. It can attend to nothing but this odious passion ; with this it is filled, possessed, infatuated. In solitude, in retirement, in the most serious employments, in the temple of God, and even at the very foot of the Altar, the mind is fixed on its favourite passion : *everything*, says the Apostle, *is impure to him whose heart is impure.*

Ah ! my dear friends—you, I mean, who have been deceived by the allurements of this vice,—look back on the days of innocence, call to mind the former sentiments of purity and virtue which were implanted in your nature ; behold the immense journey you have travelled in the paths of iniquity since this fatal vice took possession of your souls, and be astonished at the distance you have wandered from your God.

Be astonished, I say, and tremble ; for of all vicious habits, there is not one that so completely closes the avenues to repentance. The loss of grace, indeed, is caused by every mortal sin, but the vice of impurity dries up the fountain of heavenly blessings in its source. It tends to destroy the very foundations of a Christian life ; it leads to apostasy and infidelity. This is proved by daily experience. The sharp stings of remorse, disquietude, and melancholy, with which

it is attended, so powerfully urge the soul to seek relief at all hazards and at every expense, that she endeavours to eradicate her former principles; she calls them the prejudices of education; she doubts her own immortality. Dissolute at first through weakness, she wishes to be dissolute from principle; and she aspires to no higher enjoyments than the brutes', she seeks to convince herself that her end will be similar to theirs. Thus the passion that corrupted the heart, in a short time undermines the sacred edifice of the Faith.

This is not its only effect; it tends to destroy the virtues that make man amiable in society. Mildness, condescension, and affability are changed into hastiness, dissimulation, and pride; serenity of mind, the sweet companion of innocence, is succeeded by gloomy melancholy and immoderate fits of joy; evenness of temper is replaced by humour and caprice; in a word, every quality that can either endear him to men or make him acceptable in the eyes of God, is expelled from the breast. *Oh! how is the faithful city*, exclaims the Prophet, *that was full of justice and truth, become a harlot? Justice dwelt in her, but now murderers. Thy silver is turned into dross; thy wine is mingled with water* (Isa. i. 21, 22).

Were I to enter minutely into a description of the loss both of health and fortune which impurity occasions, the account would be affecting indeed. What was the primary cause of the decay of so many wealthy and noble families, which we have so frequently witnessed? Ah! could we investigate it, we should find that it owed its origin to criminal excesses; could we trace the inscrutable ways of God, we should find that on account of this vice He severely chastised the transgressor, and continued His judgments on his

children to the third and fourth generation, till at length the whole substance was taken away and given to others. You yourselves have probably witnessed its effects on individuals of the present day. You have seen the emaciated, the mutilated, the distempered countenance; you have seen the disordered frame; you have heard their complaints and their groans; you have seen them turn away with grief from the sweetest enjoyments of life, their souls being torn with remorse and melancholy, their bodies a prey to the most loathsome ulcers, and their countenances abashed by shame and confusion.

Ah! my God, thus dost Thou chastise the sinner by means of his very passions; and thus dost Thou forewarn him, by the universal decay of both his health and his fortune, of the eternal torments which Thou hast in store for those who delight in carnal pleasures.

I have already said that the vice of impurity makes the sinner insupportable to himself, and overwhelms the soul in the deep abyss of remorse and disquietude. I know, indeed, that remorse succeeds every vicious indulgence; but impurity has something in it so opposite to the excellency of reason and to the dignity of our nature, that the sinner blushes at his weakness, and is ashamed of his inability to shake off the odious yoke. A lowness of spirits and an inward sorrow of mind incessantly torment him; a secret gnawing embitters every pleasure; the impure charm is gone as soon as possessed, but a sting is left behind. He would willingly avoid reflection, but reflection incessantly intrudes itself upon him. He envies the lot of the man who is hardened and thoughtless, but he cannot attain even to that dreadful state of tranquillity. He tries to summon up resolution sufficient to shake

off the yoke of religion, but the attempt strikes a deeper horror into his mind than the vice itself.

If, indeed, the powers of his soul could be satisfied with the momentary enjoyment of lust, were it only for a short time, he would be comparatively happy; but the impure passion is insatiable. One desire creates another, one gratification occasions another. It knows no bounds; the most impassioned excesses cannot satisfy its wishes; the most unbounded licentiousness still feels a deficiency. It cloys, but it does not fill. It dwells with complacency on desires which it knows it can never satisfy. This ardour of pursuit, and this inability of ever attaining its object, is painful, is insupportable. The wretched victim is inclined to envy the brutes because they have no reflection to augment their desires; he even prefers the brute's condition to that of man, because the brute can follow his instinct without obstacle and without remorse, and is restrained neither by honour nor by duty, by neither fear nor decency, but is guided and led by inclination alone.

Oh! how degrading to human nature is this vice! And nevertheless, degrading as it is, it is frequently embellished by the poetical fictions of the lascivious muse, and sacrilegiously admired and extolled by Christians who enjoy the honour of being members of the Mystical Body of Christ. *O My people,* saith the Lord, *who hath inebriated you with this wine of fornication? Who hath converted My inheritance into a retreat for unclean spirits, and delivered up Jerusalem to the abominations of the Gentiles?*

But in vain has the world decked out this shameful passion with amorous epithets; in vain has a foolish and impious extravagance ennobled it by theatrical

representations and delicacy of sentiments. It is acknowledged by all to be a vice of the lowest and meanest kind, equally dishonourable to the man and the Christian. In the whole catalogue of crimes there is not one that resembles it. This, in no company where decency presides, is ever heard of. Its very name is a disgrace to the person that utters it. The crime itself is a foul blot upon the character and reputation of the wretch that perpetrates it, of whatever rank or condition in the world he may be; vilifying his nature, destroying the noblest faculties of his soul, and bringing down the man, with all the honours and dignities and titles that are about him, to a level with the lowest of all that is contemptible on earth. It is not my wish to exaggerate in the slightest degree the effects of this destructive passion. I know that I do not exaggerate; and I appeal with the fullest confidence to the consciences of those bad men for the proof of my assertion. I call upon the voluptuary to declare whether he would consent that publicity should be given to all his failings, to all the indecencies, all the intrigues, and all the thoughts occasioned by this passion, and that they should be seen by men exactly as they are seen by God and as they will be manifested at the Last Day. Would he stand up in defence of his actions, were that part of his life which is the most concealed because the most shameful, proclaimed aloud from the house-top? No, the world, even the world, dissolute as it is, pays homage to chastity, and stigmatizes with the brand of infamy the individual who transgresses its boundaries.

I have given but a short description of the pernicious effects of a vice which was forbidden by the Apostle St. Paul even to be named among Christians,

and which, with greater reason, ought not to be the subject of discussion in the holy place where the Spotless Lamb is immolated, or from the Christian pulpit from which are announced the chaste law of the Lord and the words of eternal life.

Ah! in those happy days when chastity was honoured with its martyrs, when Christian virgins preferred the most cruel death to the loss of this virtue, then the Christian churches resounded with the eulogies of chastity alone. The primitive pastors, the Cyprians, the Ambroses, the Augustines, exerted the powers of eloquence in extolling the excellence and advantages of virginity; and in their writings few invectives are to be found against the impure morals of their contemporaries, because few whose manners were so dissolute and tainted were to be found among them.

But now that this horrible vice has infected all ages, all sexes, all states and conditions in life; now that it has effaced the primitive features which distinguished our forefathers from the dissolute and corrupted idolaters; now that the universal licentiousness of the age is attempting to veil over its odious and disgraceful form, we are called upon by every consideration that can make the name and existence of virtue at all dear to us, to raise our voice and without restraint to declaim against the encroachment of a passion which, to the confusion of our common nature, is indulged and countenanced by all; we are called upon in the loudest manner and summoned to proclaim with the holy liberty with which our ministry is invested that if any one defile or profane the temple of God, which is his own body, him in an evil hour will God destroy.

Would to God that this faint description might

have its effect on all those of my present hearers who are under the tyranny of this fatal and execrable vice. Would to God that it could rouse them from their lethargy, and that in the fervour of repentance I could hear them exclaim: I will arise; I will subdue this disgraceful passion; I will return to my Father's house. I acknowledge that I am an ungrateful, rebellious, and unnatural son; but He is my Father, and will not reject me. I will throw myself at His feet; in the bitterness of my soul I will confess my unworthiness; I will say: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee. I have sinned against Heaven by the public scandal of my life, and by my continual abuse of Thy holy blessings. And I have sinned before Thee. But how shall I recount the secret crimes and abominations in which I indulged before Thy eyes? The very idea of my past iniquities chills my veins; I cannot recount them. My God! I have repaid the love of the Best of Fathers by the rebellious ingratitude of the most unnatural of children."

My dear friends, were you to entertain and persevere in these sentiments, what heavenly consolations would flow into your souls? with what canticles of joy would the Spirits above celebrate your conversion? O God of clemency! O God of compassion and forgiveness! lend Thine ear to the earnest prayer of Thy unworthy servant. Open the eyes of Thy misguided creatures; infuse into their hearts the spirit of compunction; that so being recovered from the error of their ways, they may be worthy to be admitted into the company of the chaste in the regions of pure and immaculate felicity.

XIII

THE WOMAN THAT WAS A SINNER

By Massillon

"And behold, a woman[1] that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind at His feet, she began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment." (Luke vii. 37, 38).

From such abundant tears, so sincere a confusion, and a proceeding so humiliating and uncommon, it may easily be inferred how great must once have been the influence of the passions over the heart of this sinner, and what a change grace now effects within her. Palestine had long beheld her as the shame and the reproach of the city; the Pharisee's household views her to-day as the glory of grace and a model of penance. This soul, fettered but a moment ago with the most shameful and the most indissoluble chains, finds nothing now capable of stopping her; and without hesitation she flies to seek, at the feet of Jesus, her salvation and deliverance. This soul, hitherto plunged in the senses and living entirely for voluptuousness, in a moment sacrifices their liveliest charms and their dear-

[1] It is the traditional and most probable opinion that the woman who was a sinner (Luke vii. 37) was identical with Mary Magdalen (Luke viii. 2) and also with Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus. The eminent Nonconformist writer, the Rev. Professor David Smith, D.D., is amongst those who uphold that Catholic view.

est ties. This soul, impatient till then of every yoke, and whose heart had never acknowledged other rule than the caprice of its inclinations, commences her penitence by the most humiliating subjections. How admirable, O my God, are the works of Thy grace; and how near to its cure is the most hopeless wretchedness, when once it becomes the object of Thine infinite mercy!

Iniquitous love had been the cause of all her misfortunes and of all her crimes; and born to love God alone, Him alone she had not loved. But scarcely has she known Him, says the Gospel, when, blushing at the meanness of her former passions, she no longer acknowledges but Him alone to be worthy of her heart; all in the creature appears to her empty, false, and disgusting; far from finding those charms from which her heart had formerly with such difficulty defended itself, she no longer sees in them but their frivolity, their danger, and their vanity. The Lord alone appears good, real, faithful, constant in His promises, magnificent in His gifts, true in His affection, indulgent even in His anger, alone sufficiently great to fill the whole immensity of the human heart, alone sufficiently powerful to satisfy all its desires, alone sufficiently generous to soften all its griefs.

It is love which makes true penance. For penance is only a changing of the heart, and the heart does not change but in changing its love. Penance is only the re-establishment of order in man; and man is in order only when he loves the Lord for Whom He is made. Penance is only a reconciliation with God; and your reconciliation is fictitious if you do not restore to Him your heart. Penance obtains the remission of sins, and

sins are remitted only in proportion to our love. *Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much.*

O man ! open here your eyes ; fathom to the bottom the destiny of your heart, and you will acknowledge that those turbulent passions which fill you with such repugnance to virtue are foreign to your nature ; that such is not the natural state of your heart ; that the Author of nature and of grace has bestowed on you a more sublime lot ; that you were born for order, for righteousness, for innocence ; that you have corrupted a happy nature by yielding to iniquitous passions ; and that, if not born for virtue, we know not what you are, and you become incomprehensible to yourself.

But you are mistaken when you consider as inclinations incompatible with piety those lively propensities to pleasure which are born with you. From the instant that grace shall have sanctified them, they will become dispositions favourable to salvation ; the more you are animated in the pursuit of the world and its false pleasures, the more eager shall you be for the Lord and for true riches ; the more you have been found tender and feeling by creatures, the easier shall be the access of grace to your heart ; in proportion as your nature is haughty, proud, and aspiring, the more shall you serve the Lord without fear, without disguise, without meanness ; the more your character now appears easy, light, and inconstant, the easier will it be for you to free yourself from your criminal attachments and to return to your God. Your passions themselves, if I may venture to speak in this manner, will become the means of facilitating your penance. All that had been the occasion of your moral destruction you will render conducive to your salvation ; you will see and acknowledge that to have received a tender, faithful, generous

heart is to have been born for piety, and that a heart which creatures have been able to touch holds out great and favourable dispositions for grace.

Read what remains to us of the history of the Saints, and you will find that those who have at the first been dragged away by mad passions, who were born with every talent calculated for the world, with the strongest inclinations to pleasure and self-indulgence, have been those in whom grace has effected the most wonderful change. The same soil which nourishes and produces great passions, gives birth likewise to the greatest virtues, when it pleases God to change the heart. In the incomprehensible arrangement of Divine Providence, even our weaknesses can help towards our sanctification. It is thus that Mary Magdalen made reparation for the iniquitous use she had made of her heart.

The love that she had for Jesus Christ was not one of those vain and indolent sensibilities which are rather the natural agitations of an easily affected heart than real impressions of grace, and which never produce in us anything further than that of rendering us satisfied with ourselves and persuading us that our heart is changed. The sacrifices we are prepared to make, and not our emotions, prove the reality of our love.

Thus the second disorder of Magdalen's sin having been the criminal and almost universal abuse of all creatures, the second reparation of her penance is an absolute detachment from all those things that she had abused in her errors. Her hair, her perfumes, her gifts of body and of nature, had been the instruments of her sinful pleasure (for no one is ignorant of the use to which a deplorable passion can apply them). In her penance, the perfumes are abandoned, and even con-

secrated to a holy ministry ; her hair is neglected, and no longer serves but to wipe the feet of her Deliverer ; beauty and every attention to the body are neglected, and her eyes are blinded with tears. In the face of that city which she had scandalized by her past profligate life, she enters into the house of the Pharisee, and is not afraid of submitting to have as witnesses of her conversion those who had been witnesses of her former crimes. Often, after our having despised the world's opinion in debauchery, it becomes dreaded in virtue ; the eyes of the world did not appear formidable to us in our dissipation, they become so in our repentance ; our vices are carelessly laid open to view, our virtues are backward and cautious ; we have gloried in vice as if it had been a virtue, and we blush for being virtuous as though virtue were a shame.

If it is an error to represent to ourselves a change of life as the mere cessation from our former debaucheries, without adding to that those expiations which wash them out ; it is likewise another error to regard these expiations as involving us in a state of gloom and wretchedness. The first consolation of our sinner's penance is a holy dilection for Jesus Christ, a love widely different from the profane love which had hitherto engrossed her heart. Her depravity had attached her to men, lewd, inconstant, deceitful, rather companions in her profligacy than real friends, less watchful to render her happy than attentive to the gratification of their own inordinate passions ; to Amnons who from the moment they have obtained their wishes despise the unfortunate object of their love ; to men whose weaknesses, artifices, transports and defects she well knew, whom she inwardly acknow-

ledged to be unworthy of her heart, and to whom she paid attention more through the bias of passion than the free choice of her reason. Her penance attaches her to Jesus Christ, the model of all virtue, the source of all grace, the principle of all light. The more she loves Him, the more does she find Him worthy of being loved. The more she studies Him, the more she discovers His attractiveness and finds Him the faithful, disinterested friend of her soul, Who has tranquillised her heart by purifying it, Who has filled the whole extent of her love and restored to her that internal peace which creatures had never been able to give her. Scarcely is her love for Jesus Christ commenced when she is certain of being loved. She hears from His divine mouth the favourable sentence which in remitting her sins confirms to her the love and affection of Him Who pardons her. Not only are her iniquities forgotten, but she is urged to be persuaded that they are forgotten, pardoned, washed out. All her fears are prevented, and ground is no more left for mistrust or uncertainty ; no longer can she suspect the power and fidelity of Him Whose love she has secured. Such, too, is the lot of every contrite soul on quitting the tribunal where Jesus Christ, through the ministry of the priest, remits our sins.

By her sins Mary Magdalen had been degraded in the eyes of men ; they beheld with contempt the shame and the infamy of her conduct ; and the Pharisee is even astonished that Jesus Christ should condescend to suffer her at His feet. For the world which authorizes whatever leads to dissipation, never fails to cover dissipation itself with infamy ; it inspires and approves all the passions, yet it always blames all the conse-

quences of them ; its lascivious theatres resound with extravagant praises of profane love, but its conversations consist only of biting satires upon those who yield themselves to that unfortunate tendency ; it praises the graces and charms that light up impure desires, and it loads you with shame from the moment that you appear inflamed with them. Such had been the afflictions by which the passions and the debaucheries of our sinner were followed ; but her penance restores to her more honour and more glory than had been taken away from her by the infamy of her past life. This sinner, so despised in the world, whose name was not mentioned without a blush, is praised by Jesus Christ for the things which even the world considers as most honourable, for generosity of sentiments, kindness of heart, and the fidelity of a holy love ; this sinner whose scandal was without example in the city, is exalted above the Pharisee ; the truth, the sincerity of her faith, of her compunction, of her love, merits at once the preference over a superficial, pharisaical virtue ; this woman, whose name was concealed as if unworthy of being uttered and whose only appellation is that of her crimes, is become the glory of Jesus Christ, a triumph of grace, and an honour to the Gospel.

PROVIDENCE

By Bossuet

"And Abraham said to him: Son, remember that thou didst receive good things in thy life-time, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke xvi. 25).

This universe, and particularly the whole human race, is the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which He Himself governs and rules according to immutable laws. Let us meditate on the secrets of that Divine polity which dominates all nature, and which, including in its ordering the instability of human things, disposes the inequalities and strange happenings that go to make up the varied lives of private individuals, with no less care than He bestows on those great and memorable events that decide the fortunes of empires.[1]

As regards the disposition of human events, confused, unequal, irregular as it appears to us, I am

[1] See in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* the article on Bossuet by the late Ferdinand Brunetière. He admired Bossuet's religious philosophy no less ardently than his literary style; Brunetière's conversion to the Christian Faith is said to have been brought about by his study of Bossuet's sermons. See also Brunetière's *La Philosophie de Bossuet,* in his *Etudes Critiques* (*5e série*). Bossuet's teaching on the idea of God's Providence as the law of history—a teaching anticipated in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*—is to be found in his *Discours sur l'Histoire Universelle.* "The long chain of particular causes," wrote Bossuet, "which create and dissolve empires is dependent on the secret decrees of Divine Providence. From the heaven of heavens God guides the reins of every kingdom; all hearts are in His hand. Sometimes He curbs the passions; at others He relaxes the bridle, and thereby agitates the whole human race.

often inclined to compare it to those pictures which are not infrequently pointed out to us in the libraries of the curious as a sort of game of perspective. At first sight we observe nothing but formless details and a confused medley of colours, which seems to be either the first attempt of a prentice hand or some child's daub rather than the work of a skilled brush or pencil. As soon, however, as a person who is in the secret shows you from what point you must look at it, everything is changed. All the crooked lines arrange themselves in right order, all the confusion is cleared up, and out of the chaos emerges a face with all its lineaments and proportions clear and distinct, where before there had been no semblance of a human countenance. This, as it seems to me, is a fairly accurate picture of the world in its apparent confusion and hidden justness, a justness which we can never discern except by looking at it from the one point of view which faith in Jesus Christ reveals to us.

I saw, says Ecclesiastes, *a strange thing under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but time and chance in all* (Eccles. ix. 11). *I saw*, he says again, *that all things happen alike to the just and to the unjust, to him who offers sacrifices and to the blasphemer and the unbeliever* (Eccles. ii. 3). All through the ages this complaint has been made, that iniquity triumphs and that innocence is oppressed; and yet, as if to prove that nothing is certain, nothing absolutely assured in these matters, we sometimes see innocence on the throne and iniquity on the rack. Ah! what confusion in the picture! does it not seem as if the colours had been thrown simply by chance upon the canvas, only in order to blot and blur it?

Seeing this, the man of the world, hasty in drawing his ill-considered conclusions, first rails against the seeming disorder of the universe, and then (fool that he is) says in his heart: *There is no God* (Ps. lii. 1), adding with a sort of condescension, "or if there is a God, He abandons human life to the caprices of fortune." Yet pause a moment, and do not let your ignorant and sinful folly hurry on your judgment in so important a matter. Perhaps you may discover that what seemed to be confusion is really secret strategy, and if only you can light upon that one point of view from which these things must be regarded, all inequalities will right themselves, and where you imagined there was nothing but disorder you will see nothing but wisdom.

Yes, indeed, never doubt for one moment but that this picture has its key, that there is also a point of view from which, as the Preacher tells us, all that looked distorted, confused, disorderly, will assume a wholly different aspect. *I saw*, he says, *under the sun, in the place of judgment, wickedness; and in the place of justice, iniquity* (Eccles. iii. 16): that is to say, iniquity occupying the tribunal and even the throne where justice alone should preside. It could not attain to greater eminence or occupy a seat on which it had less claim. What, think you then, was the conclusion drawn by Solomon from the consideration of such strange disorder and disturbance? Was it that God abandons human affairs to chance, leaving them destitute of His guidance and direction? On the contrary. This wise monarch learns a very different lesson from what seems to be the inconsistencies of life and its ordering. *Then*, he tells us, *I said in my heart, God shall judge both the just and the*

wicked, and then shall be the time of everything (Eccles. iii. 17).

This is indeed reasoning worthy of the wisest of men; he discovers in the human race the greatest confusion possible, in the rest of the natural world he sees order so perfect that he can only admire and rejoice in it; he is fully aware of the impossibility of our nature, the only one made by God to His likeness, being the only one abandoned by Him to chance; thus, convinced by reason that there should be order among men, and seeing by experience that it is not yet established, he concludes of necessity that we have something to expect and look for. And herein lies the whole mystery of the counsels of God; this is the grand ruling principle of the Divine policy. God wills that we should in the midst of time live in the perpetual expectation of eternity. He ushers us into a world in which He displays to us the most admirable order, to show us that His work is directed and guided by wisdom; but yet in that world He purposely leaves some apparent disorder, to make it clear to our minds that He has not yet put the last finishing touch to it. And why? In order to keep us always in expectation of the great day of eternity, when all things will be set straight by a final and irrevocable decision, when God once again separating the light from the darkness, will in the Last Judgment put justice and wickedness in their right places, and then, as Solomon says, *it shall be the time for everything.*

Well, a greater than Solomon has told us, in that wonderful Sermon on the Mount, to open the eyes of our mind as well as of our body and consider the works of God and the just and wise ordering of all things in Heaven and Earth. Think how marvellous is the

economy of the universe ! how excellent the provision made for the human family, how perfect the government of this vast empire ! The supreme power which constructed the world and in that world made nothing that was not very good, yet made some better than others. This mighty power made heavenly bodies which are immortal, and earthly bodies which are perishable ; beasts magnificent in their size and strength, and birds and insects which seem almost insignificant in their smallness. It made those mighty trees of the forest which stand unshaken by the tempest of ages ; and the flowers of the field which open in the morning and fade and wither before nightfall. There is inequality among the units of this marvellous creation, because the same beneficent power which gave existence to the noblest of them, will not withhold the gift from the very meanest. But from the greatest to the least, there is not one which does not come under the ruling, guiding, fostering Providence of God. It feeds the birds which call to Him by their harmonious singing in the early dawn ; it clothes in the most incomparable beauty those flowers which fade indeed so quickly, but which yet during their little day are so dazzling in their loveliness that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. And if God does this by His Providence for the lower creation, can we whom He has made in His own image, enlightened with the knowledge of Himself, and called to His Kingdom, can we for a moment believe that He forgets us, and that on us alone of all His creatures the ever-watchful eyes of His Providence do not rest with a Father's loving care ? *Are not you of much more value than they ?* (Matt. vi. 26). For even if there should appear to you to be some disorder

in the arrangement of things here below, if the reward of virtue seems too tardy in its bestowal, and if vice is not overtaken by punishment as quickly as might be expected, think for a moment of the eternity of the Supreme Being. His designs conceived in the womb of that unchangeable eternity depend neither on the years nor on the centuries which pass before Him like so many moments only; and the whole period of the world's duration is needed for the perfect development of the schemes of wisdom so profound. And yet we, poor mortals whose days pass so swiftly, expect in the course of those few days to see all the works of God accomplished! Because we ourselves and all our thoughts, plans, and enterprises are restricted to so short a period, we would have the Infinite confined within the same limits, and all that the mercy of God prepares for the good, and all that His justice destines for the wicked, displayed in this brief space of time which we call human life. This is not reasonable. Let us leave the Eternal to act according to the laws of His Eternity; and far from trying to reduce that eternity to the measure of our own littleness, let us labour diligently to enter into its limitless immensity. If we do this, if in this happy liberty of mind we measure the counsels of God by the rule of eternity, we shall look without impatience upon this confused medley of human affairs. It is true that God does not as yet separate the wicked from the good; but that is because He has appointed a day when this separation will be made before the whole human race, when the numbers of both will be complete. This it is which drew from Tertullian those remarkable words: *God*, he says, *having postponed the Judgment to the end of the world, does not precipitate*

that separation of good from evil which is a necessary condition of such a Judgment, but, in the meantime, treats with almost equal goodness every member of the human race. Notice especially these admirable words : *God does not precipitate the separation of good from evil.* To precipitate matters is one of the distinguishing marks of weakness, which is obliged to hurry on the execution of its designs, because their being carried out depends on opportunities, and these opportunities are certain moments so rapid in their flight as to necessitate haste in those who are compelled to make use of them. But God Who is the arbiter of all time, Who from the centre of His Eternity develops the whole ordering of events throughout all ages, Who knows His own almighty power, and that nothing can escape from His sovereign hands,—ah ! He does not precipitate His counsels. He knows that wisdom does not consist in always doing things at the moment, but in doing them at the right moment. He allows the foolish and the presumptuous to censure His designs, but He does not think fit to hasten the execution of them because of the murmurs of ignorant men. It is enough for Him that His friends and servants watch from afar, with humility and trembling, for the coming of His Day ; as for the rest, the day of their punishment is appointed : *He foreseeth that His day shall come* (Ps. xxxvi. 13).

But yet, you will say, very often God does good to the wicked, and allows great evils to befall the just ; and even though such disorder may last but for a moment, it is none the less a contradiction of justice. Ah ! but this is just where we get into difficulties from not distinguishing rightly between good and evil. There are two sorts of what we may call blessings. The one

sort is a mingling of good and evil ; and it depends entirely on the use made of it, which quality predominates. For instance, sickness is an evil, but it will become a great good, an untold blessing, if you sanctify it by patience. Health is a blessing, an immense good, but if it inclines its owners to riotous living it becomes a terrible evil and danger. Here are blessings and misfortunes mingled, participating in the nature of both good and evil, either the one or the other predominating according to the use to which we apply them.

But let us understand that Almighty God has among the treasures of His mercy one sovereign good which can never be an evil, and that is everlasting happiness ; and that He also has among the treasures of His justice certain supreme evils which can never by any possibility be turned into good for those who suffer them, such as are the torments of lost souls. The rule of Divine justice does not permit the wicked ever to enjoy that sovereign good, or the just ever to be tormented by this extremity of evil ; and it is for this reason that Almighty God will one day make that great severance of the wicked from the just. But as regards mingled blessings and misfortunes, He gives them indifferently to both classes of men.

How wonderfully, with what divine skill does not the holy Psalmist draw the distinction between blessings and misfortunes ! He says : *In the hand of the Lord there is a cup and the wine is mixed* (Ps. lxxiv. 9). First there is the pure wine, then the mixed, lastly the dregs. The pure wine represents the joys of eternity, joys unalloyed with any evils, joys untainted by any bitterness. The dregs represent the torments of the lost, torments untempered by any alleviation.

The mixed wine is a figure of those mingled blessings and misfortunes of which we may change the nature by the use which we make of them in this present life. Strange medley of good and evil, over which nevertheless Providence always presides, disposing all things with unerring wisdom! This is indeed the time when the just and the unjust jostle one another in a confused and apparently disorderly multitude, but it is the time too for merit: the good must be tried in order to prove them; sinners must be endured in patient expectation; good and evil must be mingled, that the wise may profit by them, while fools abuse them. But there will be an end to all this confusion. Come, purified souls, come, innocent souls, come, drink of the pure wine of God, of His joys which are eternal and unalloyed. But for you, hardened and impenitent sinners, separated for ever from the just, for you there is no more joy, no more feasting and dancing and riotous living, come now and drink the bitter dregs of the cup of Divine justice. This is the great separation which will put all things in their right places by the pronouncement of a final, an irrevocable sentence.

Great and wonderful are Thy works, O Lord God Almighty; just and true are Thy ways, O King of ages (Apoc. xv. 3). Who shall not praise Thee, who shall not bless Thee, who shall not admire Thy providence, and fear Thy judgments? Truly *the unwise man does not understand these things, and the fool does not know them* (Ps. xci. 7). *These things they thought and were deceived* (Wis. ii. 21); for it hath pleased Thee, O Divine Architect, not to suffer the beauty of Thy great edifice to be visible until the last touch has been put to it by Thine own

almighty hand, and as the prophet tells us : *Only in the latter days shall we understand the mystery of Thy counsel* (Jerem. xxiii. 20). But then it will be late indeed to profit by a knowledge so necessary ! Let us therefore forestall the appointed hour ; let us, in spirit, be present at that General Judgment, and from the lowest step of that dread Tribunal before which we must one day appear, let us contemplate the final settlement of all human affairs. In the fear, the terror, the awful silence, in which all nature will then be wrapped, think of the derision and contempt with which the reasoning of sinners will be received, of sinners who were emboldened in sinning by seeing the wickedness of their fellow-men in some cases unpunished ! Now at last they will on the contrary be amazed at their own blindness in not seeing that the very circumstance of this impunity was but a clear warning of the awful severity of the final Judgment. I declare most solemnly that the dreadful calamities which have through all the ages been inflicted on certain individuals or nations by Almighty God to avenge His insulted majesty, do not seem to me so terrible as the impunity of the vast multitude on whom in this world no judgment lights. If here below He punished all sinners, I should believe that His justice had exhausted itself, and I should not live, as I do now, in the continual expectation of a more formidable separation of the wicked from the good. Now, as things are, not even the long-suffering kindness and patience of God can leave us in doubt as to the absolute certainty of some great change, slow but sure in coming. As yet truly things are not in their right place. Lazarus, innocent though he is, still suffers ; the rich man, although a sinner, still enjoys some peace ; thus

neither trouble nor rest are as yet where they ought to be ; but this cannot last. What says Holy Scripture ? *Son, in thy life-time thou hast received good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things.* A change must come ; under the government of a God so good and so just such confusion could not possibly be eternal. Therefore, continues Abraham, now that you have both reached your everlasting dwelling-place, *now* another state of things begins, *now* everything will be in its right place, *now* suffering will no longer be averted from the guilty who deserves it, nor consolation refused to the just ; *now he is comforted and thou art tormented.* This is the counsel of God, faithfully revealed to us in His own Scriptures. Let us try to see what lesson we should learn from such a revelation.

To any one who is fully persuaded that Divine Wisdom governs him and that immutable counsels are guiding him towards the one goal and end (namely, everlasting life), nothing appears either great or terrible except in its relation to eternity. This is why his faith in Providence inspires him with two predominating tendencies—to admire nothing and to fear nothing that ends with this present life.

He should admire nothing ; and for this reason. The wise and eternal Providence which, as we have said, has made two sorts of good, which dispenses to us in this present life a mixed good and reserves that which is pure and perfect for the future, has established this law : that he who has clung too fondly to the inferior good shall have no share in that which is supreme. For (says St. Augustine) God would have us learn to distinguish between the good things which He scatters

so bountifully in this present life to console us poor exiles, and those which He reserves in the life to come to make the eternal joy of His beloved children ; or, to use plainer language, He wishes us to be able to distinguish between those good things—really in a measure contemptible—which He so often bestows on His enemies, and those precious gifts which He treasures up so sedulously for His faithful servants.

How many convincing examples of this truth we may find in the world's history. Think of the chosen people, the children of Abraham, at that time the only adorers of the true God, restricted to a small obscure corner of Asia, the country of Palestine, and hemmed in by the proud monarchies of the East, the nations of unbelievers. Or to come nearer to our own times, consider that declared enemy of the Christian faith, upholding and strengthening the blasphemous pretensions of Mahomet, by the might of his great armies bearing the Crescent above the Cross of Jesus Christ, and by the success of those armies thinning daily the ranks of Christianity.[1] For myself, when I call these things to mind, I am more and more convinced that in the estimation of Almighty God these gifts of splendour, pomp, and power which He bestows in this present life are of very trifling importance ; and looking at them from this point of view, I too realize their worthlessness, their insignificance, their utter nothingness.

Yes, a steadfast belief in Providence, as it always keeps before the minds of the children of God the Last Judgment, makes all things else mean and insignificant in their eyes ; but it does more than this, it delivers

[1] In 1662 the Turks were threatening to conquer Hungary and were infesting the Mediterranean.

them from fear of all other things. What indeed should they fear? Nothing startles them, nothing offends them, nothing repulses them. There is this memorable difference between particular causes and the universal cause of the world, that individual causes jostle one another, cold wars with heat, and heat with cold. But the primary and universal cause, which includes in one both parts and whole, finds nothing which contends against it, because even if the parts jostle one another it is without prejudice to the whole; they are in accordance with that whole, of which their very dissonance goes to make up the perfect harmony. It would take too long to unfold this reasoning; but let us apply it to ourselves and our own affairs. If we throw ourselves heart and soul into our own private interests, striving eagerly for some great man's patronage, or to make a fortune by perhaps a somewhat irregular method, we are morally certain to find others who run up against us, disputing with us for the same prize; unexpected obstacles come in our way, we are thwarted, harassed, impeded in our course, some spring in the machine refuses to act, it breaks down; our hopes, our schemes, our crafty designs, all vanish in smoke. But how different it is with those whose hearts are set immutably upon the whole, not upon any of its component parts, not upon proximate causes, whether power or the favour of the great or crafty schemes for amassing wealth, but upon the primary and fundamental cause, upon God, His will, His providence. For those who do this there is nothing disturbing or conflicting, nothing that thwarts their plans; on the contrary, all things work together for the carrying out of those plans, because, as says St. Paul, all things work together for their salvation, that

salvation which is the one great affair of their lives, the one subject and object of all their thoughts. *All things work together for good to them that love God* (Rom. viii. 28).

Anyone who thus meditates upon Providence, so vast, so limitless as it is, enfolding in its designs all causes and all effects, gains himself in expansion of thought and judgment, learning to put the right value upon all things. If God sends him prosperity, he receives the gift with deep humility as coming from Heaven, and shows his appreciation of the Divine mercy by scattering his wealth broadcast among the needy and the wretched. If he is in adversity, he remembers that *trial worketh hope* (Rom. vi. 4), that war makes for peace, and that if his own virtue has to fight for victory it will one day be crowned. He never despairs, because he is never without resource. Always he seems to hear the voice of Jesus, of the Divine Saviour uttering those consoling words which are indeed deeply graven upon his heart: *Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a Kingdom* (Luke xii. 32). Thus to whatever extremity he may be reduced, the faithless murmur that he has lost his all will never fall from his lips. How indeed could it do so? How could he despair of his future and think himself a ruined penniless man, when a royal kingdom, yes, and the Kingdom of God, is still left to him, is his own inheritance, to be inalienably his own through all Eternity?

This is his state of mind as regards himself. In what befalls others he finds no less material for profitable consideration. Everything that happens in this world of change and of perplexity, has its meaning and lesson for him. It at once confounds and edifies

him, amazes and encourages him. All things combine to strengthen his inner life, to make his spiritual vision more keen and clear: the marvels of grace as well as the strokes of severest justice, the fall of some and the perseverance of others, the examples of weakness as well as those of strength, the patience of God as much as His justice exercised as a warning to sinners. For, says St. Augustine, if He launches the thunderbolts of His wrath upon the heads of the guilty, this is for the amendment of the just, who, dreading a similar chastisement, strive more and more to purify their hearts and lives.

Let us think seriously of those things; they are worthy of serious thought. Do not let us stop short at the contemplation of one side of the picture which this present life offers to us, with all its glare, its glitter, its pompous display of wealth and pleasure. There is a reverse side to the picture; it shows what the future may have in store for us. What will it avail us to have lived in luxury, courted, admired, in a position of authority, surrounded with all that is dainty and pleasant to the eye, if Abraham says to us: *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time didst receive thy good things, now all is changed or soon will be?* Of all that power, splendour, grandeur, on the other side of the grave nothing will remain. But I am wrong; something *will* remain, for it is the voice of the Holy Ghost which tells us: *The mighty shall be mightily tormented* (Wis. vi. 7). That is, those who in this world sit in high places, who are wealthy, powerful, influential, will (unless they take good heed now to the way in which they make use of these advantages) find themselves in the next world plunged into a gulf of unending torments, deep in proportion to the height

from which they fell. Ah! but even while I speak thus, *I hope better things of you* (Heb. vi. 9). There are riches and dignities which have been, and ever will be, sanctified by the use made of them. Abraham who condemns the rich man, was himself in his lifetime wealthy and powerful, but he sanctified his power by making it humble, temperate, subject to God, helpful to the poor. Profit by his example, and you will escape the terrible punishment of the rich man, hard-hearted and neglectful of a neighbour's misery; and with happy Lazarus so poor and despised in this life, you will rest for ever in Abraham's bosom, in the Paradise of God, a possessor of the eternal riches.

XV

THE HONOUR OF THE WORLD[1]

By Bossuet

The honour of the world is that great golden statue which Nabuchodonosor set up in the plain of Dura (Dan. iii. 1), commanding all men to fall down and adore it. It is of prodigious height, *sixty cubits* (says Holy Scripture), for nothing appears more lofty and elevated than the honour of the world. It is o*f pure gold*, for nothing seems richer or more precious than this same honour. *All peoples and languages adored the golden statue*, they offered sacrifices in its honour ; the trumpet, lute, and harp rang out its praises. And are not these a true figure of renown, of the applause and acclamations which go to make up what men call glory ? Well, it is this great and splendid idol which I want to-day to cast down at the feet of the Saviour. I am not content, with the three holy children of Babylon, to refuse to burn incense to it, and to deny it that adoration which the multitude are paying to it. No, that will not satisfy me ; I want to hurl the thunderbolt of Gospel truth at this idol ; I want to cast it down full length before the Cross of my Saviour ; I want to crush it, to reduce it to atoms, and then to offer it in sacrifice to Christ Crucified.

Come forth, then, honour of the world, vain phantom

[1] Sermon preached before the Prince of Condé at Paris on Palm Sunday.

deluding the ambitious and the proud ; I summon you before a tribunal at which your condemnation is inevitable. It is not before Cæsars and princes, it is not before heroes and great generals, that I force you to appear ; as they were all your adorers, they would give sentence in your favour. No, I call you to a bar of judgment at which presides a King crowned with thorns. They have mockingly robed Him in purple, they have nailed Him to a Cross, that He may offer to the whole world a spectacle of ignominy. It is to this tribunal that I remand you ; it is before this King that I accuse you. And of what crimes, do you ask—you who are listening to me ? I will tell you. There are three capital crimes of which I accuse the honour of the world.

In the first place, I accuse it of flattering and of corrupting virtue ; secondly, of disguising vice and of lending credence to its professions ; finally, to fill up the measure of its presumption, of ascribing to men what belongs to God alone, and of enriching them, where it is possible, with those things of which it has robbed His Divine Majesty.

In the first place, then, before the Cross of Jesus Christ I accuse the honour of the world of being the corrupter of virtue and innocence. And it is not I alone who bring this accusation, I have St. John Chrysostom to support me in it. In his 17th Homily upon the Epistle to the Romans, the great preacher tells us that virtue which loves praise and vainglory is like a woman who gives herself up to a life of sin and shame. Indeed it is a remarkable fact that purity and modesty not only shrink from every act and word that is contrary to decency and propriety, but also from every kind of vainglorious display and from extrava-

gant praise and admiration. This is so with both men and women who have been brought up from their childhood in well-regulated homes, in an atmosphere of purity and delicacy. And assuredly this is because reason itself as well as a God-given instinct teaches us that just as the body has its purity which immodesty corrupts, so the soul has a certain integrity which may be violated by praise.

We must, however, go further and penetrate into the origin of that shame which a soul, well-nurtured and in the grace of God, feels in receiving the praises of the world. This shame is natural to virtue, to Christian virtue of which alone I take any cognizance. It is, I say, in the very nature of such virtue to dread praise; how can it be otherwise when we remember our Divine Lord's warnings and commands on this subject? He says: *Take heed that you do not your justice before men to be seen by them* (Matt. vi. 1). Again, as regards prayer: *When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber and having shut thy door pray to thy Father in secret* (Matt. vi. 6). Again, respecting almsgiving: *When thou dost an almsdeed, sound not a trumpet before thee; let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth* (Matt. vi. 3, 6).

Following out this teaching of the Gospel, this insistence upon the retiring nature of Christian virtue, its beauty and sweetness which it loves to keep hidden from the eyes of the world, I find an exact prototype in the character of a modest, pure-minded young girl brought up under the parental roof in extreme quietness and seclusion. She is not taken to theatres or public assemblies of any sort. She stays at home, busy with her simple daily occupations, under the watchful eyes of God her Father. This Heavenly Father loves to see her thus modest, self-restrained, retiring; He destines

for her a Bridegroom, Jesus Christ Himself ; He desires that she should give to this Divine Spouse a pure heart which has never been corrupted by any other affection. He prepares for her, in the happy future, honour and praise such as is alone worth having ; and meantime until that joyful day comes He will not let her be spoilt by the praises of men. This is why she shuns society, this is why she loves her secrecy and her solitude. If indeed occasionally the world catches a glimpse of her marvellous loveliness—for it is too radiant to be always entirely hidden—her perfect simplicity shields her from that notice which she never wishes to attract ; all those who admire her beauty are warned by her modesty *to glorify her Father Who is in Heaven* (Matt. v. 16). This is a perfect picture of Christian virtue. Is there anything more admirable than its discreet and modest loveliness ?

But now how does vainglory act towards this beautiful creature, so pleasing in God's sight ? St. John Chrysostom thells us tat it lays traps for her innocence, enters like a thief into the quiet household, poisons the wells of pure and wholesome teaching ; then it entices her from her modest retirement, persuades her to court the admiration of men, though hitherto she had believed that she was (as she truly is) made only for God ; and then it leads her, step by step, along that broad road that seems to her so smooth and bordered with such gay flowers, on and on, a little further and a little further, then down a steeper way that loses itself in a deep gulf where innocence is lost ; and this creature, once so pure and lovely, now lies tangled in the brambles, soiled with the mud of that bottomless pit of shame. Ah ! my Crucified Jesus, this is the crime of which I accuse the honour of the world, which under-

takes first to corrupt virtue and then to sell it at so vile a price, to sell it for the praise of men. Do Thou, O holiest Lord, judge and condemn this most vile crime !

My second ground of accusation against the honour of the world is its desire to accredit vice by making it appear wholly different, in the eyes of men, from what it really is. In justification of this accusation, I assert in the first place that all those who are dominated by the honour of the world are invariably and inevitably vicious. *Vice,* says St. Thomas Aquinas, *comes from an ill-regulated judgment.* Now I maintain that there is nothing more ill-regulated than the judgment of those of whom we are speaking ; since, making (as they do) honour to be their sole end and aim, it follows naturally that they prefer it even to virtue ; and such being the case, you may imagine how far astray they are certain to wander, how ill-regulated their conduct and whole life are sure to be ! Virtue is one of God's many gifts to man, and the most precious of them all ; honour is a gift bestowed by men upon one another, and not even the greatest of those gifts which it is in their limited power to give. And yet, in your pride and blindness, you are actually foolish enough to prefer this almost contemptible human gift to that Divine one which the Eternal Father produces from His treasury of precious things for your acceptance ! Is not this a proof that your judgment is worse than ill-regulated ? that it is upset, distorted, absolutely overthrown ? You must then, honour of the world, in the first place admit being actually confounded and struck dumb by my demonstration that nothing originating from you, claiming you as its author and producer, can be otherwise than vicious.

In the second place, however, we must notice that vicious as this brood is and must be, it does not include those who are the most deeply degraded, the most steeped in infamy of every sort and kind. To attempt to glorify the Achabs and Jezabels of Sacred Scripture, the Neros, Domitians and Heliogabaluses of profane history, even to wish to do it, would be mere absurdity. To honour vice which is nothing but vice, which shows itself in all its hideous deformity, without one sheltering rag of decency, is a thing impossible ; matters are not yet so desperate even in this poor world. No, the vices which the honour of the world crowns are more decent vices ; or to speak more correctly—for what decency can there be in vices ?—they are more specious ones ; there is about them some semblance of virtue. Honour which was intended like a faithful handmaid to wait upon virtue, knows exactly how she clothes and adorns herself, and cunningly steals from the beautiful creature some of her ornaments with which to deck and disguise the monster vice which it desires to set up in the world in her stead. That this is done we know too well by sad experience ; how it is done it is now my business to discover, and to expose this mystery of iniquity in all its breadth and length.

In order to do this I must first remind you that there are two classes of virtues. One is the true and the Christian sort, severe, constant, inflexible, always keeping closely and steadily to its rules of conduct, incapable of being turned aside from them by any influence however powerful. This is not the world's virtue ; that world does indeed give it some slight recognition as it passes it, some scant and grudging praise for form's sake, but never advances it to posts of distinction ; it is not thought capable of dealing

with business matters ; something more yielding and accommodating is wanted to win the favour of the public. It is, moreover, far too serious and too retiring ; and if it is unwilling to take part in the intrigues and schemes of society, does it expect to be sought out in its retirement and privacy ? No, no, the world will hear nothing of this sort of virtue.

There is quite another kind which the world fashions for itself, much more accommodating and plastic ; a virtue adjusted, not to rules that would be too austere, but to the opinion, to the varying humours of men. This is a commercial virtue ; it will take great care not always to break its word, but on certain occasions it will not be in the least degree scrupulous, and it will manage to keep up a good appearance at the expense of others. This is the virtue of the worldly-wise ; that is to say, of those who really have no virtue at all ; or rather it is the specious mask beneath which they hide their vices. Saul gives his daughter Michol to David, he has promised her to the slayer of the giant Goliath ; he must satisfy the people and keep his word, but when the opportunity presents itself he will find a pretext for taking her away from him. Jehu, having destroyed the house of Achab, according to the command of the Lord, offers in sacrifice to the living God the idol of Baal, his temples, his priests, his prophets ; he does not, says Holy Scripture, leave a single one of them alive (4 Kings x. 17, 25, 26, 27). This in itself is a good action ; but, says the Scripture, *he departed not from the ways of Jeroboam, who made Israel to sin, nor did he forsake the golden calves of Bethel and Dan* (4 Kings x. 29). Why did he not destroy them as well as Baal and his temple ? Because that would have injured his own prospects, interfered with his own plans. Because

he remembered the miserable policy of Jeroboam : *If I suffer these people to go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to God in His Temple, they will return to the House of Judah,* to those kings who are their lawful sovereigns (3 Kings xii. 26) ; I will build an altar for them here ; I will give them gods whom they may worship without leaving my kingdom and putting my throne in peril.

Such is in truth the virtue of the world, a deceitful, fictitious virtue which has only the semblance of the reality. Why was it ever invented, since that same world wishes to be vicious without hindrance or restraint ? *Because,* says St. Chrysostom, *evil cannot stand quite alone, it is either too malignant or too weak, it must be supported by some kind of good, even it be only the shadow of virtue or some one of its many ornaments.* Let a man profess himself openly to be a cheat and a swindler, and no one will be taken in by him ; let a thief take the life of a comrade in order to rob him, and he will be shunned as you would shun a poisonous reptile. Men so absolutely vicious as that are at a discount with everyone. But it is very easy for them to change this. There is no need for them to put on the mask of virtue or the gilded trappings of hypocrisy ; vice may still appear as vice, and, provided there is just a little suspicion of something better in their character and dealings with one another, that is quite enough to gain for them the world's honour.

Take for instance a man who has grown rich by tremendous frauds, his life is one long course of sordid avarice, everyone despises him ; still he always keeps a good table and makes a show of liberality, spending for his own purposes what is really other people's money, and is, on the whole, considered to be a very respectable member of society. Take another instance;

two men quarrel, and settle their dispute by a duel, in which one is killed. It is a very disgraceful affair; still there was some show of courage in it, both men (says the world) made a brave fight; and the survivor, although the laws condemn him and the Church excommunicates him, is applauded by that world in spite of laws and Church. Is there in fact any one vice which the honour of the world does not accredit, however little it may try to disguise itself? Even the vilest and most shameful of sins, which when openly practised is called debauchery, if it puts on ever so flimsy a disguise, a little show of fidelity, discretion, perseverance, does it not at once find that it can show a bold front and seem worthy of the noblest and the most exalted in the land? Why, it actually loses its odious name and is called gallantry, courtesy, a suitable characteristic of a man of the world! It is marvellous that such things can be. And yet if we remember that those who know nothing about precious stones are easily taken in by a little glitter and colour, so as to be satisfied to spend their money on a mere counterfeit bauble, and if we also consider how very little the world knows about real virtue, it may seem less surprising that it should be dazzled by the faintest semblance of it, and that the honour of the world should find it very easy to accredit vice.

Therefore the sinner lives at his ease, in a sort of triumph, enjoying more or less a public reputation for every kind of excellence. If from time to time his conscience is troubled, if there are moments when it denies him that honour which the world is always eager to give him, there is a remedy soon found for his ill.

Here are flatterers, numerous and busy enough for the purpose, thronging his doorsteps, his antechamber,

nay, his very banqueting hall, even sitting down at his table, so intimate are they with him. Let him listen to their whispers, so softly and insidiously breathed into his ear. They tell him that he has a name in the world, that his reputation is an established fact. They know well enough that there is always lurking within his breast a secret flatterer, which will chime in with all that these outsiders may suggest or assert, and which has the power of making itself heard at all moments. They make a careful study of his character and get such a clever hold of his weak points, that he falls in at once with all that they suggest to him. He quite gives up the task of looking into his own conscience, which shows him his own ugly deformity too plainly ; he will use no mirror but this one which flatters him ; and, in the words of St. Gregory, *forgetting entirely what he really is, he goes about always on the look out for what others may be saying of him, and fancies himself just what flattery represents him to be.* Assuredly God will revenge Himself upon him ; and this will be His vengeance : He will silence at last all flatterers and will abandon the proud sinner to the reproaches of his own conscience.

O Lord, I beseech Thee, judge the honour of the world, which makes vice not only pleasing to others but even to itself. Thou wilt do this, I know. Yes, the day of His Judgment will come, and then will the prophecy of Isaias be fulfilled : *The mirth of the timbrels hath ceased, the noise of them that rejoice is ended, the melody of the harp is silent* (Isa. xxiv. 8). At last this tumult of applause has ceased to deafen the ears of the sinner ; all is silent ; his flatterers seem to be struck dumb, the music of their praises no longer soothes and delights him. What a change this will be !

what a day of sudden amazement for all, both the wise and the foolish! The Bridegroom will come at an hour when none look for Him, when none expect Him. The Wise Virgins will go forth to meet Him with their lamps burning; their good works are the oil which feed them; now they shine brightly before God and men in that night of darkness and distress; now Jesus Himself, in Whom alone they gloried, will praise them in the presence of His Eternal Father. But as for you, O Foolish Virgins, what will you do? You who have no oil in your lamps, and who are vainly imploring others to give you of theirs? You to whom no praises are due, and who long so passionately and so hopelessly for a little borrowed glory? In vain will you cry: *Give us of your oil! we too desire praise, we too would fain hear from those lips Divine one word of that approval which is so lavishly bestowed upon others!* Alas! for those foolish virgins there can be no such word. Across the solemn darkness comes this stern demand: *Who are you?* and then, *I know you not* (Matt. xxv. 9–12). Like those foolish virgins, the sinner, self-deceived and blinded by the false glare of the world's honour, will in that dreadful day cry out for light, marvelling that he should be thus abandoned, forsaken, overtaken by such horrible darkness and despair. Where are his flatterers now? They are taking part against him. Their own damnation is certain, it is a just reward of their crime in leading him into sin; therefore they desire to drag him down with them into the lowest depths of everlasting misery.

Yes, sinful and degraded soul, now when it is too late you will see that you were yourself the chief of all your flatterers. Now you will detest your life, now you will curse all your actions; and the shame of your

perfidies, the injustice of your frauds, the infamy of your adulterous conduct, will be eternally before your eyes. What has become of that honour of the world which palliated all your sins? It has vanished into smoke. Oh, honour of the world, how short was your reign! how I laugh to scorn all your vain triumph and pompous show which lasted only for a day! how flimsy and poor was the disguise in which you managed to cloak vice! so flimsy that you cannot prevent the monster from being recognized by that tribunal before which I am accusing you! Having summed up my evidence and finished my accusation, I now demand sentence to be pronounced. You will have no favour shown you in this judgment; because, besides the fact that your own crimes are inexcusable, you have infringed upon the rights of Him Who presides at the tribunal, and you have done this that you might invest His creatures with them. This is the crowning point of my indictment.

Since all good belongs to God, and man is of himself nothing, it is clear that nothing can be attributed to man without encroaching upon the rights of God and His sovereign dominion. This proposition, the truth of which is so well known, is of itself sufficient to justify what I assert, namely, that the most serious of all the charges brought against the honour of the world is that of desiring to deprive God of what is His due in order to invest His creatures with it. In fact if the honour of the world contented itself with representing our advantages to us so that we might give thanks and praise to our Lord for them, we should not call it by such a name, but should without a moment's hesitation rank it among the Christian virtues. Man, however, who

desires to be flattered, cannot enter into this feeling ; if you compel him to attribute his possession of any sort of good, wealth, talents, no matter what it may be, to any source except himself, he thinks that you are robbing him of it, and no praise is really acceptable to him unless he can with the most intense self-satisfaction say in his heart, *I did it all myself !*

Although it may not be possible to express in words the audacity of this conduct, we may yet form some idea of it from the reasoning of St. Fulgentius. That great bishop tells us that men set themselves up above God in two different ways : either by doing what He condemns, or by attributing to themselves what is His gift. You do what God condemns, when you make a bad use of His creatures ; you attribute to yourselves what God gives you, when you presume upon yourselves. Doubtless these two modes of behaviour are very criminal, but we can easily understand that the latter is by far the most insolent ; and although we can never sufficiently blame the audacity of a man who, whatever may be his way of doing so, abuses the gifts of His Creator, yet that audacity is unquestionably more outrageous when he appropriates these gifts to himself than when he simply makes a perverted use of them. And why ? Because the first is the action of a rebellious subject who disobeys his Sovereign, whereas the second is an attempt against the person of that Sovereign, and an attack upon His throne ; and if by the first crime the rebel repudiates the authority of the Prince, by the second he attempts in some sort to make himself that Prince's equal by attributing His power to himself.

You may perhaps think that so insane an attempt is rarely to be met with among men, that they are not yet

so outrageous as to wish to make themselves equal with God ; but I must disabuse you of such an idea. I must, alas ! tell you that this crime is, to our shame, only too common among us ; yes, ever since our first parents lent an ear to that most dangerous flattery : *You shall be as gods* (Gen. iii. 5). Since then we all really wish to be little gods, we are all striving and struggling for independence. Listen to what the Holy Ghost says to the King of Tyre, addressing in the person of that haughty sovereign all the proud of the earth : *Thy heart is lifted up, and thou hast said : I am God* (Ezech. xxviii. 2).

Is it possible that a man can so absolutely forget what he really is as to say : *I am God ?* No, that is not said so openly ; we should like to be able to do so, but the consciousness of our mortal, our finite nature forbids it. How then does a man say : *I am God ?* The words following the passage which I have just quoted, give the explanation : *Thou hast set thy heart as if it were the heart of God* (Ezech. xxviii. 2). What is the exact meaning of these most significant words ?

In the first place, we must remember that as God is the universal principle and the common centre of all things ; as He is, in the words of an ancient writer, the treasury of being, and possesses all things in Himself in the infinity of His nature, He must of necessity be filled with Himself, He must think only of Himself, He must be occupied only with Himself. It is fitting, indeed, that Thou, O King of Ages, shouldst have a heart filled only with Thyself ! O Source of all things ! Centre of the Universe ! . . . But the heart of the creature is fashioned, ah ! how differently. It is but a little brook which must flow back to its source ; it possesses nothing in itself, it is rich only in its origin ; it is nothing in itself, and must only seek itself in that essence from

which it came forth. Proud man, this thought is beyond you ; you are but a vile creature, and yet *you have set your heart as if it were the heart of God ;* you seek for honour in yourself, you are full of nothing but yourself.

Let us, then, judge ourselves, and not in our pride and self-complacency flatter ourselves. Here is a man of rare eloquence, holding a prominent position in council, swaying the minds of his audience by his powerful language and carefully thought-out arguments ; well, this man, this gifted orator, if he does not go back to the fountain-head, if he believes that it is his own eloquence and not the resistless power of God which is touching the hearts of his hearers, is tacitly saying to himself : *Our lips are our own* (Ps. xi. 5). Again, the great statesman who has brought the most complicated and troublesome affairs to a successful issue and is dizzy with the applause of his fellow politicians, if he fails to render to God the honours due to Him, is assuredly saying in his heart : *Our mighty hand, and not the Lord, hath done all these things* (Deut. xxxii. 27). Or the clever business man, who by lucky investments and every kind of crafty financial scheme has made his fortune without one thought of God Who gave him all his power of mind and action ; is he not saying with Pharaoh : *The river is mine, and I made myself* (Ezech. xxix. 3) ? Yes, thus it is that the honour of the world makes us attribute to ourselves all that we do, and ends by setting us upon pedestals like little gods.

Well, proud and self-complacent soul, thus deified by the honour of the world, see how the eternal, the living God abases Himself in order to confound you ! Man makes himself God through pride, God makes Himself man through humility ! Man falsely attributes

to himself what belongs to God ; and God, in order to teach him to humble himself, takes truly what belongs to man. This is the remedy for insolence ; this alone has power to confound the honour of the world. I have arraigned it before this God-Man, before this humbled God ; you have heard this accusation, now hear the sentence. Yet it will not be spoken by word of mouth ; it is enough for you to see it written as it is in letters of blood. You will need nothing more to convince you that the honour of the world has lost its suit. This sentence condemns the judgment of men by an entirely new method of judgment. Jesus Christ only condemns them by allowing Himself to be judged by them and to receive from them on His own Person the most unjust sentence ever known ; the excess of this injustice makes all their other judgments henceforth discredited. At that supreme moment, at that awful Trial, all who took part in it, whether as judges, accusers, witnesses, or mere onlookers, with scarcely an exception, judged wrongly ; Jews and Romans, high and low, rich and poor, the chosen of God and the pagans, the learned and the ignorant, priests and people, our Lord's friends and His enemies, His persecutors and His disciples. Yes, on that Hill of Calvary, on that Cross of shame, Jesus Christ the Incarnate God, our Pattern, our Master, our King, deigned in His own sacred Person to undergo a sentence than which nothing so malicious and corrupt, nothing so blindly extravagant, nothing so lawless, so varying, so precipitate, so impious, has ever been known or ever will be known in the world's history ; and this He did to disabuse our minds for ever of any confidence in, any esteem for, that shifty, many-sided, dishonoured thing which we call the Honour of the World.

XVI

SANCTITY AND DUTY

By Bourdaloue

" God is wonderful in His Saints " (Psalm lxvii. 36).

When we consider God in Himself, it is impossible for us to give Him in Himself that admiration which is His due ; so infinitely great is He, so far above and beyond us. Again, as on earth it is only in His works that we know Him, it is, properly speaking, in those works only that we can admire Him. Now the Saints are the supreme work of God, and therefore it is, says the royal Psalmist, that in His Saints He appears to us supremely worthy of our admiration : *God is wonderful in His Saints.*

In the opinion of St. Augustine, the Christian heroes whose sanctity is so indisputably acknowledged to be of an order infinitely superior to anything that pagan philosophy, I do not say practised, but even taught, imagined, or attempted to simulate, have left us an example which is an invincible proof of the existence of a God, of a religion, and of a supernatural grace working in us. And why ? Because sanctity so eminent as theirs could never take root and flourish in a nature so corrupt as ours ; because reason and philosophy fall far short of such a height and depth ; because only the grace of Jesus Christ can raise men so

immeasurably above the level of poor humanity; and because consequently such sanctity is clearly the work of God. Sin and evil will never efface the memory of the Saints, and will never proscribe them. They will, to the end of time, retain a convincing power to which even the licence of a corrupt age must yield and before which the pride of this world must quail and be confounded.

What is Sanctity?

We cannot doubt but that St. Paul had in his mind the latter days of the Church, and especially the age in which we live, when, writing to Timothy, he especially deplored and condemned the blindness of some perverted souls who, though incessantly busy with the study of religion, never arrived at the knowledge of its truths; who day by day committed to memory its maxims and precepts, yet never mastered its essential principles; who exhausted themselves in idle speculations, hoping by that means to acquire a reputation for cleverness, but all the time remaining perfectly ignorant as to this religion simply because they never practised it. These, and such as these, appeared indeed to be seeking the Kingdom of God, but never found it, because they sought it without knowing what they were seeking; always far away from true solid piety, because they had never formed a just idea of what that piety really was. *Ever learning and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth* (2 Tim. iii.). This was one of the evils against which the great Apostle warned the Church of God; and it is exactly what we see at the present day. However intellectual and refined the age in which we live may pique itself upon being, can we deny the fact that one of its most prevalent abuses is

that of its allowing itself to be prejudiced by the grossest errors concerning real piety and Christian sanctity ?

There are some who make sanctity consist in what appeals to their senses ; and others in what appeals to their taste ; some again in what is extraordinary and singular ; others in what is extreme and outrageous ; some in what is brilliant and dazzling ; others in what is terrible and even repulsive. There are those who picture it to themselves as something quite beyond and outside their own condition in life ; and there are those who are fully persuaded that no strength or power which they possess could ever bring it within their reach. There are people who will tell you that sanctity is a thing absolutely incompatible with all the usages and rules of society ; and others who twist and distort it into a scheme of life that is utterly opposed to all their most binding obligations, social and domestic. Some stop short at the employment of certain means which they consider inseparable from its nature, and thus entirely neglect the end to which those means were to lead them ; while others revel, as it were, in vague ideas of that end, with no thought of the means by which they have to seek it. How wide a field for our consideration ! What a store of food for reflection !

Well, at the very outset, I assert most plainly and firmly that the example of the Saints contradicts all those errors ; that it demonstrates in the clearest manner possible that sanctity does not consist in any of those things, that it does not depend on them in any way, that it has nothing in common with them, nay, rather that it is something far better, far more reasonable than any such travesty of a great reality. And why ? Because now, in the age in which we live, the

Saints by their example preach to us a truth most touching, most edifying, and consoling : namely, that independently of our senses or our tastes, without the éclat of certain good works and equally without their austerity, without going out of our own sphere or quitting the beaten track of ordinary routine, without adopting any special means to attain our end or proposing to ourselves any other aim than that marked out for us in our present circumstances and condition of life, sanctity is within the reach of every one of us. Yes, true sanctity,—which consists in doing our duty, and doing it always as in the sight of God ; in being thoroughly all that we ought to be and that God would have us to be ; in fashioning our whole life and conduct in a manner worthy of the state to which God has called us. This is a truth which, once understood, we cannot fail to admit ; a truth taught us by all the Sacred Scriptures, but brought home to us more especially by those great patterns and examples whom we commemorate on the Feast of All Saints.

For, disabused of all illusions, in the Saints I see clearly what it is to be holy, and I see it easily and without any entanglement of precepts, as though sanctity revealed to me its very self of itself and made itself evident to all my faculties. And since, outside God, there is nothing more excellent, nothing more divine, than such sanctity as this—that is to say, sanctity based upon duty, regulated by duty, and bounded by duty,—as soon as I come face to face with it, much as I may be inclined to rebel against my own duties, I feel myself forced to give it my esteem, and of this involuntary esteem there is born in my soul a secret love which it is still more impossible to resist. I say to myself : This is what you ought to be ; this

is what your reason, conscience, and religion reproach you for not being.

No, truly the Saints did not become Saints by doing in the world extraordinary things for God. If, says St. Bernard, they did do such and if the record of their lives bring them before our notice, these extraordinary and dazzling works may well have been the effects and outcome of their sanctity, but they were never its basis or its measure. They did these things, I grant you, because they were Saints ; but in no instance were they Saints because they did them ; indeed they might have been Saints without doing them, just as they might have done them and yet never have been Saints at all. Yes, think how many of the Blessed, now for ever happy and secure in Paradise, never did on earth one single thing that excited the admiration of their fellow-man or gave them any sort of distinction above others. And how many of the lost, now by the justice of God suffering the pains of the unquenchable everlasting fire, yet while on earth did splendid actions applauded by men though condemned by God, and were perhaps even rejected by Him on account of those very same pretended virtues for which the world had praised them. Saints, do I say, without any such adornments ? Yes ; there are countless multitudes of the elect whose names are written in Heaven although unknown to the Church on earth. God, says St. Augustine, delighted to sanctify them in the obscurity of ordinary everyday life, and when He welcomed them into His heavenly kingdom He did not say to them : *Enter, faithful servants, into the joy of your Lord, because you have done great things for Me ;* but : *because you have been faithful in the smallest things* (Matt. xxv.). Then, on the other hand, remember that miserable

band of lost souls, not only not Saints in spite of all those admirable works of theirs, but cast out for ever from the Presence of the King, condemned in a manner even by their own lips ; for hear them crying out in their despair : *Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied and cast out devils in Thy name?* And listen to the stern answer of the Judge : *I never knew you, I do not know you now ; prophets and miracle-workers you may indeed have been, but those are not the marks by which I recognize and make choice of such as are Mine to all eternity.*

So true is what I am telling you that, as you may remember, Mary, the holiest of creatures, has scarcely a miracle ascribed to her in the Gospels ; nay, I may surely say that not a single one is directly imputed to her. And it is the same in the case of St. John the Baptist, the precursor of our Lord, Who nevertheless pays him a glorious testimony, saying that among the children of men there was none greater or holier in the sight of God. The same may be said as regards a hundred other things with which sanctity is constantly being confounded. It is so in the case of those austerities which are so much admired by the world at large but which, as St. Francis de Sales wisely remarks, are at the best only means of attaining to sanctity, but in no way whatever sanctity itself. There are in Heaven many Saints of the highest order who on earth never lived the life of hermits or ascetics ; nay, even the Saint of Saints, the Son of God Himself, did not do so, or at least not to outward appearance. And it may be that Hell is thronged with penitents and anchorites, lost through their own overweening vanity and self-esteem.

How then is it, you ask, that the Saints became Saints ? and what was the real basis of their sanctity ?

The Saints were Saints because they did their duty, and they did their duty because they were Saints. The close union of those two facts bears an impress of reasonableness and truth which cannot fail to be recognized. Saints because they fulfilled their duty; that is to say, because they brought their state of life into harmony with their religion, but in such a manner that their religion was always the guiding principle of their state of life and that their state of life never got the upper hand of their religion. Saints because they rendered to every man his due; honour to whom honour was due, tribute to whom it was due, obedience to those whom God had set over them in authority, courtesy to those whose society they were bound to frequent, help to those whom they were called upon to succour, care to those for whom they were responsible, justice and charity to all because there are none to whom we do not owe the one and the other. Saints, because by their conduct they ennobled every charge entrusted to them, every dignity conferred upon them, every position in which they were placed by the Providence of God; because they sacrificed ease, health, nay, even life itself, to the claims of their calling, whatever toil, weariness, vexation, and trouble this might involve. Saints, because in all matters, great or small, they obeyed the voice of conscience rather than that of self-interest; because they preferred honesty to gain, truth to flattery; because they were sincere in word, straightforward in their dealings, just in their judgments, and upright in their commercial transactions. Saints, because being subject to God they remained in that state of life in which He had placed them, without any restless strivings, content with their lot, envying the happiness of no man, faithful to their

friends, generous to their enemies, grateful for benefits, patient under the ills of life, forgiving injuries, supporting the weak. Yes, they were all this, because their duty, so wide in its extent, embraced all these things, and because all this was necessary to the making of a Saint.

But I add, that because they were Saints they fulfilled all those obligations. This is another principle of incontrovertible truth. In fact nothing but sanctity could have so wrought in them as to dispose them for the perfect discharge of all those duties. Without sanctity they must have yielded again and again to those human temptations that continually beset them ; in the slippery paths of life which they had to tread, their probity and right-mindedness would often and often have abandoned them, and while satisfying one obligation they would have violated another. But because they were Saints they kept the whole law and fulfilled all justice ; because they were Saints they united in their own persons things apparently the most contradictory and difficult of reconcilement : authority with charity, policy with sincerity, the world's honours with humility, application to business with piety. Because they were Saints they maintained their social position with modesty, their rights with disinterestedness, their reputation with self-distrust and entire detachment from self. Because they were Saints they were humble without meanness, great without haughtiness, sincere without imprudence, courageous without foolhardiness, prudent without duplicity, gentle and peaceable without pusillanimity. Because they were Saints, they always possessed themselves in peace and at the same time absolutely distrusted themselves ; in prosperity they relied upon God, and in adversity they were supported by faith.

The foundation of their glory and their blessedness was fidelity to duty, zeal in discharging it, the giving up of all things that hindered the perfect fulfilment of that duty. This is what God rewarded in His Saints ; nor need we wonder that it is so, since this is what cost them so much, this it was which formed the subject matter of every sacrifice made by them for God and of every victory gained by them over themselves. For if we would not fail in the performance of any one of our duties, we must of necessity again and again mortify ourselves, renounce ourselves, do violence to ourselves. Any other perfection than this would have had nothing of difficulty in it for the Saints ; any other perfection would have been unworthy of the crown that God had prepared for them. True sanctity brings with it a certain benediction which redounds to the glory of God, by which men feel themselves touched, and which keeps us ourselves self-controlled, self-restrained, preserved from a thousand irregularities and disorders.

Is Sanctity Possible for Everybody ?

Truly an authority great as that of God Himself, was needed to bid men, sinful men, be Saints even in this life : *Be ye holy, because I am holy* (Levit. xi.). It needed all the authority of a God Incarnate to say to men of the world : *Be you therefore perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Matt. v.). Yet thus it was that God spoke to His people under the Old Law, and thus it is that Jesus Christ speaks to us under the New, the Law of Grace. God does not demand too much of us ; He requires of us nothing that is beyond our power.

I assert that in spite of the demoralizing influence of

the corrupt tone of the age in which we live, in spite of our own frailty and of all the obstacles that surround us, the example of the Saints is a convincing proof that sanctity has in it nothing impracticable, nothing impossible for us ; that it has in it even nothing so difficult or so rigorous that it does not bring with it its own alleviation, some inexpressible sweetness which makes what seemed repulsive attractive and desirable ; and that, consequently, no pretext is left us to excuse our criminal slothfulness or to exculpate us if we do not labour continually to sanctify ourselves and do not succeed in our efforts.

We are too apt to rank sanctity among things impossible. We picture to ourselves Christian sanctity as something too far above and beyond us ever to be reached, and, casting upon God the blame of our cowardice and sloth by calling them our weakness, we say, like the prevaricating Israelite of old : *Which of us can go up to Heaven* (Deut. xxx.) ? which of us can attain to such perfection ? But, on the Feast of All Saints, God brings before us a vast multitude of Saints who in the world were what we are unwilling to own it is possible to be there,—Saints who in that very same world in which we live did what we despair of ever being able to do, who found sanctity there and found it even where it has the greatest obstacles to surmount. Now if on the one hand God thus closes our lips, on the other He opens our hearts. And how ? By reanimating our hope and proving to us by these examples that we can do all things in Him Who strengthens us, and that, if we are indeed sinners, it only depends on ourselves, sinners though we are, to become Saints.

It was this that put the finishing stroke to the conversion of St. Augustine. As you know, one thing only

held him back, but that one thing presented to his imagination insurmountable difficulties and rendered ineffectual all the operations of grace in his soul. God indeed spoke to him inwardly, telling him that in the end he would conquer, but to this mysterious inward voice he himself always answered that it could not be, that it was an effort beyond his strength. In this atrange spiritual contest, this conflict (if I may so speak) between God and himself, he was always hostile to God, always the slave of himself, that is, of his own passion and sin. At last the all-conquering grace of Jesus Christ made a final onslaught upon him, and gained the day. The saint himself has described for us the marvellous vision which did the work. Suddenly he seemed to see before him Sanctity herself, beautiful and majestic in form and features, but with a sad severity of tone and countenance, who, while she reproached him for his obstinate impenitence, pointed to a vast host of virgin souls thronging around her, and seemed to try to excite his courage and awaken his confidence by saying : *What ! can you not do what those were able to do ?* This voice was the voice of God ; and as that Divine voice breaks the cedars and the rocks, Augustine could not resist it. That direct and candid spirit which he had preserved in the midst of all his wanderings and errors, could not hold out against such conviction. He allowed himself to be persuaded, to be touched ; he resolved to desire, and to desire in reality what hitherto he had desired only in seeming ; and henceforth he did desire so perfectly, so effectively, that nothing ever afterwards succeeded in shaking the steadfastness of that desire and the firmness of that resolution.

Now what was to Augustine only a vision, is for you a reality. It is not sanctity as an ideal, an imagination,

a figure, but it is the God of sanctity Who speaks to you on the Feast of All Saints, saying : " Lift up your eyes, sinner, and look upon these blessed ones whom I gathered one by one from earth and whose number now exceeds that of the stars in the heavens ; look at these generous athletes who, because they wrestled valiantly, because they finished their course worthily, now wear the crown of justice which they have merited. Why cannot you also do what they have done ? Why will you not do it ? "

I do not for a moment deny that in the practice of sanctity there are many painful and laborious duties to be encountered. I admit that the road leading to Christian perfection is narrow and that there are crosses all along the way. Yet not only does God keep good account of all this, and to our credit, but it is of faith that we have more than what is necessary to enable us to bear those crosses, more because we have even that which impels us to love them ; and if the Holy Ghost did not assure me of this, the example of the Saints is a sufficient testimony.

Tertullian, speaking of Jesus Christ, said that the example of the Incarnate God was the universal solution of all a Christian's difficulties : *Christ is the solution of all difficulties.* And in support of this assertion he says that there is no difficulty which the example of Jesus Christ cannot soften and sweeten, nay, even remove altogether out of our path, so that if we do but follow this one single Example we can no longer find any difficulty in the observance of the Laws of God. Nevertheless, as Tertullian goes on to say, there remains one essential difficulty which the example of Jesus Christ could not destroy, because it originates in the very nature of Christ Himself : the Incarnate God

being exempt from all our weaknesses, holy by nature, and almighty in His very essence, He was immeasurably more able than we could ever be to do what He did and to suffer what He suffered. Thus in spite of the example of our Divine Lord we should, it would appear, always have been in a position to entrench ourselves behind the shelter of our own weakness and insufficiency, excusing all our shortcomings by this specious argument. But, behold! the ground is cut away from under us by the example of the Saints. For when I see men like myself, of the very same nature, weak and fallible as I am, venturing all things for God, suffering all things for Him, and suffering joyfully, what can I say? How can I complain of the heaviness of the yoke and the severity of the law? Are we not outraging the grace of God if we think that it cannot sustain us under burdens which are really often very light ones, seeing that it enabled the Saints even to find sensible sweetness in the midst of the most cruel sufferings and all the terrors of death?

No, there is no excuse left to us; for what excuse can we possibly offer which the example of the Saints does not scatter to the winds? We are busied with the cares of the world; were not the Saints so likewise? We often find ourselves exposed to danger by unexpected temptations; did not the Saints find themselves in the same difficulty? The torrent of the world's pernicious customs and tone of thought carries us away with it; did not the Saints strive against and resist it? Evil examples are our ruin; did not the Saints keep themselves from contact with such? We have passions; had not the Saints the same, as powerful, as compelling? Our temperament is delicate and sensitive; were the Saints made of brass or iron?

Tell me one single obstacle standing in the way of our eternal salvation which the Saints had not to overcome. Tell me one trial through which they did not pass, one temptation which they did not successfully resist. What sufficient ground is there to justify the contrariety that is to be found between their life and ours, between their fervour and our indifference, between their holiness and our irregularities, between their austerities and our self-indulgence? When we are brought face to face with God, what shall we be able to advance in our defence? Did they serve any other Master than we serve? Did they believe any other Gospel than we believe? Did they expect any other glory than that which is set before us?

But, after all, in spite of all that, you sometimes say, how is it possible to bring Christian sanctity into accordance with the claims and obligations of the world? How can one in certain states of life, under certain conditions of existence, be a Saint? You imagine that your state of life is one not only in opposition to, but actually incompatible with, sanctity. If this were so, what you call your state of life would be for you a crime; and for no other reason it would be your duty to quit and wholly abandon it: but since it is your state of life, the one marked out for you by God Himself, you are offending His Providence and wronging His Divine Wisdom by regarding it as an obstacle to your sanctification. There is in the world no state of life which may not be one of sanctity. Tertullian indeed seems inclined to make an exception when he expresses a doubt whether Emperors and Kings could be Christians, or whether Christians could occupy those high places, ruling and governing the world. But we will cast discredit on these doubts, since experience

teaches us that all down through the ages none have shown themselves more fit to occupy the throne and wield the sceptre of command than those whom Christianity has trained and moulded from infancy, fitting them thus for their high estate.

But, putting aside the question as regards Kings and Emperors and looking at yourselves, on this great Feast of All Saints Almighty God is showing you most plainly that between sanctity and your own state of life, whatever that may be, there can exist the very closest alliance. Do you want to be convinced of this ? Enter in spirit into that Glorious Temple in the Eternal Heaven in which so many of the Blessed reign even now with God. You will see there Saints who in the world held the same positions that you are holding at the present time, who had the same claims to meet, the same business to carry on, the same offices to hold, and who not only succeeded in sanctifying themselves under these various circumstances, but made use of these circumstances to bring about their sanctification. Run through the long list of names of these blessed ones, and you will see that some of them lived, as some of you are living, at the Courts of Princes, and that the more devoted they were to religion and to God the better they served their Prince. You will find some who, like you, distinguished themselves in battle, nay, perhaps distinguished themselves more brilliantly even than you, because sanctity, far from weakening their valour and military prowess, only strengthened and increased those soldierly virtues. You will find others who had, like you, to deal with business matters and who,—forgive my saying this—if you are not as holy as they were, managed those affairs more worthily and

more irreproachably than do you. In a word, you will find there many who were all that you now are, and who moreover were Saints.

Yes, there are such as those in Heaven, and it is those whom you ought especially to honour. Those are your patrons and at the same time your models. And it is the same with every other state of life. It is in this that the Providence of God is at once so worthy of all love and adoration. He has given us in His elect as many different types of sanctity as are needed to make up that mystical variety which is, according to the Prophet, the fairest ornament of the Bride of Christ, the Church. It is for this reason that God, bestowing His grace and allowing it to take different forms according to the character or circumstances of the individuals who receive it (1 Peter iv. 10), has made Saints of all varieties, so far as was required for the sanctification and perfection of the universe ; Saints differing in dispositions, inclinations, genius, talents, as well as in position and condition of life. He has chosen them from among the poor and the rich, the ignorant and the learned, the weak and the strong, in the married state and in celibacy, lawyer and soldier, merchant and monk. He delighted in forming Saints in those very situations in which sanctity seemed to have the most difficulties to overcome ; prodigies of humility even on the throne, of austerity in the midst of the most enticing allurements, of recollection and self-restraint amid all the fret and tumult of temporal cares. He furnished them all with graces of vocation, graces of perseverance, with remedies against sin, with means of salvation proportionate to their needs. Finally, He has not permitted in the world a single profession that has not had, and will not have, its Saints. And why ? Not only

that there might not be an individual on earth who should be justified in imputing his sins and follies to his condition in life, but in order that there might not be an individual whose very profession should not present to him a living portrait of that sanctity which is the peculiar property of that profession.

Ah, my God! how wonderful You are in Your Saints, and how profound and sublime is the science of the Saints! This science, O God, which You have taught to Your elect and which has made them what they are, appears to me more marvellous than all the works of Your power. What perfection should we not see in the world if the world were governed according to the science of the Saints! Of what are the children of men thinking when they neglect it? Without this science of the Saints, whither will all the other sciences lead them?

XVII

RELIGION AND MORALITY

(Synopsis of Sermon)

By Bourdaloue

Although morality and religion are, according to the world, widely different in their principles, in their object, and in the aims which they propose to themselves, yet the union that exists between them is nevertheless so close a one that, taking them in that fullest extent which ought to be theirs, we may say that they are absolutely inseparable. In the first place, there is no morality without religion. In the second place, there is no religion without morality.

No Religion, No Morals.

There is no morality without religion. Why? Firstly, because nothing but religion can be a universal principle and a solid foundation for all the duties of morality. Secondly, because no other motive than that of religion can be proof against certain temptations to which true morality is continually exposed. Thirdly, because a man who has shaken off the yoke of religion ceases to have any difficulty in emancipating himself from all the other laws which might keep him in order and regulate his conduct, or in getting rid of the ties and responsibilities with which human

society has shackled him and without which morality cannot possibly subsist.

Religion is the sole principle on which all the duties that go to make up true morality can be firmly established. For, says St. Thomas Aquinas, it is religion which binds us to God, and it is in God, as in their centre, that all the duties which bind men to one another by the close intercourse of society are reunited. Thus in virtue of the law which I have received and which I accept, the law of serving God, I render by a necessary consequence to each individual all that is his due; because in God only I find what obliges me so to do.

In fact, it is this view of God and of His law, this view of conscience, which makes me submit to authority fully and unreservedly. Tertullian makes use of this proof to convince the pagans that they ought to regard our religion as conducive to the public safety and the common welfare. For, he tells them, it is this religion which teaches us to pray for their Cæsars, to serve faithfully in their armies, to pay exactly and honestly the public taxes and tributes. And certain it is that in any State in which all things were ruled by the laws of Christianity perfect peace and order would reign.

But once let the principle of religion, that primary spring of action, be destroyed or even distorted in the soul, and there ceases to exist in that soul any rule of guidance, any honesty of purpose and conduct; or at least if such continues to drag on a feeble existence, it only manifests itself fitfully, spasmodically, it is no abiding, prevailing force. For on what would it be founded? On reason? But what is reason, corrupted by sin, and enfeebled by passion? and what scandals would not occur if everyone according to his own

caprice and the suggestions of his own senses made himself the arbiter of what he could do, of what he ought to do, of what belonged to him, of what was permitted to him ? This is why in public business, in treaties, and in all important civil transactions, an oath, which is really a solemn and open protestation of religion, is required. A proof, says St. Chrysostom, that without the seal of religion it is considered impossible to rely upon man's reason.

I appeal to your own feelings in the matter. Which of you would care to trust his life and fortune in the hands of a man without religion ? Even an atheist would sooner confide in a man who has religion than in an impious unbeliever like himself.

You will tell me that independently of religion there is a certain love of justice with which nature itself has inspired us. But, without enquiring too closely as to what this love of justice amounts to, I ask you if there are many men in the world who would pique themselves upon the possession of it, were they fully persuaded that there is no God and no such thing as religion ? If I held that opinion, I should look upon myself as my own one aim and end, and, as a necessary consequence, I should bring everything to bear upon myself and should believe that I had a right to sacrifice everything for myself. And here I must call your attention to the extravagant folly of that miserable policy of which one of the so-called sages of these days gloried in being the author : a policy which takes no count of religion except in as far as it is necessary in order to establish a man's position in society, and which only retains the outward form and semblance of religion. Without adducing any other proofs in contradiction of so detestable a maxim, suffice it to say that this dam-

nable policy actually brings about its own destruction. For it at least recognizes the necessity of an outward show of religion to restrain people within the limits of duty, and this is of itself an admission that reason alone cannot maintain in the world that morality which ought to regulate it. From which fact I draw the conclusion that a true religion is indispensable, since true morality cannot be founded upon falsehood.

Secondly, I affirm that no other motive than that of religion is proof against certain delicate temptations to which duty and morality are incessantly exposed. I call a temptation *delicate* when it is a question of a compromise between self-interest and justice, and when the one may be safeguarded at the expense of the other. Is it not in such cases as these that we see every day of our lives reason giving way if not supported by religion? and hence so many disorders in all the states and conditions of life, just because in all these states and conditions there is so little religion to be found.

Thus, when the devil came to tempt Jesus Christ, by what means did the God-Man overcome temptation? By religion: *The Lord thy God shalt thou adore.* Whereas, if religion is wanting, there is no temptation, no inducement to evil, which will not overcome us. And this is doubly true of a deserter from the Faith, who having once believed believes no longer. For what may we not fear from a man who has ceased to fear his God?

Thirdly, I say that a man without religion finds no longer any difficulty in emancipating himself from all the other laws which might restrain and regulate his conduct, nor in breaking even the most inviolable ties imposed upon him by society and without which

morality cannot exist : ties of dependance, of justice, of fidelity, even of blood and of nature. This it is which teaches kings and the rulers of States in our own day to keep men of profligate life and habits out of their counsels, and makes us too either oppose or shun them.

Let us honour our religion. While it exists within us God will be with us ; or even if through sin we should lose it, we shall always have the means of recovering it. Only let us beware lest that Divine light should ever by our own fault die out wholly in our souls ; for if that should happen what resource will be left to us ?

No Morals, No Religion.

There is no religion without morality. I am speaking of true religion. For all our religion without morality is only a phantom of religion and only a scandal to religion.

If, says St. James, anyone thinks himself to be religious and bridles not his tongue, *his religion is vain* (Jas. i. 26). Now if the Apostle could speak thus of slander, how will it be with those innumerable evils and disorders, so much more pernicious in their nature and effect, which strike at the very root of men's dealings with one another, as regards morality, and which nevertheless they pretend to say can be harmonized with religion ?

As grace supplants nature and as faith is, so to speak, grafted upon reason, so also religion has for its basis morality. For, as says St. Jerome, it desires a subject worthy of itself and worthy of God. To be just, faithful, disinterested, without reproach in the world's estimation, and to be a Christian and to have religion in order to support and sanctify all these virtues, is the

invariable order of things to which religion is bound to conform. Without this God will have none of your worship, for how is it possible that what is even in the eyes of men reprehensible could be pleasing to God? We, however, reverse this order of things altogether and form for ourselves grand ideas of religion resting upon no foundation, because at the same time we are neglecting the primary duties of fidelity and justice. What is this but a phantom?

Secondly, I say that religion without morality is a scandal. For this it is which exposes religion to contempt and censure, and which gives to profligacy a certain sort of superiority and ascendancy over religion. I know that we ought to distinguish religion itself from those who profess it; but is the world sufficiently equitable to make this distinction? When then we see Christians destitute of morality, that is to say, self-engrossed, choleric, violent, vindictive, pitiless, deceitful, affected, dishonest, think of the immense advantage gained by irreligion from such examples!

Let us, then, hold fast to morality; let us be kindly, gentle, courteous, humble, honest, modest, patient; free from all deceit, artifice, ostentation, haughtiness: this will edify the world more than all our fervours and penances. Such, dear Lord, is the testimony which Thou dost expect from us; and how deep a disgrace would it not be for a Christian not to do at least in part, by the purity of his life and conversation, what so many a martyr has done by his firm, unwavering constancy in the midst of the severest, the most terrible tortures?

XVIII

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST

By Massillon

Man had been placed on earth with one end and object only, namely, that he might render to the Author of his being that glory and homage which were His due. All created things reminded man of this duty; yet these very things led him further and further from the fulfilment of it. To the supreme majesty of the Creator he owed his adoration and homage; to His fatherly kindness, his love; to His infinite wisdom, the submission of his reason. This duty, deeply engraved in his inmost heart and born with him, was incessantly being proclaimed to him by the myriad tongues of all creatures, animate and inanimate; he could neither listen to the voice of his own conscience nor to that of his surroundings, without hearing the insistent call of this duty, blending with all other sounds and striving to overmaster them. Yet we find him turning a deaf ear to the voice, shutting the door of his heart upon the Claimant, looking with distorted vision upon the work of creation. We find him, in his contemplation of that wonderful work, absolutely ignoring the honour and the worship due to the Divine Architect; in the benefits with which the creative Hand loads him, forgetful of the love which he owes to his Benefactor; failing to grasp, in the midst of the obscurities and perplexities of natural phenomena, the impossibility of sounding

by mere reason the unfathomable secrets of God, or to realize in what absolute mistrust of his own powers he ought to live. Hence it was that Idolatry rendered to the creature that worship which the Creator had reserved for Himself alone ; the Synagogue honoured Him indeed with the lips, but the love due to Him was confined to acts of external homage wholly unworthy of Him ; Philosophy lost itself in a labyrinth of vain thoughts and imaginings, measuring the mind of God by that of man, and believing that reason which knows not its own self aright can yet arrive at the knowledge of all truth. These three wounds, deadly, festering, growing ever deeper and wider, covered at last the whole face of the earth. In a word, God was no longer known and glorified, and man had ceased to know himself.

And to what an excess had not Idolatry carried its profane worship ? The death of a beloved one very soon raised that person to the rank of a divinity, and his poor ashes, on which the fact of his utter nothingness was written in such indelible characters, became themselves the title of his glory and immortality. Conjugal love made deities to itself ; impure love did the same, and insisted on having its own altars ; wife and mistress, husband and criminal lover, had their temples, their priests, their sacrifices. The folly and madness of worship so strange and abominable spread far and wide, infecting the whole universe like a loathsome disease ; the majesty of the laws of the Empire actually authorized it ; the magnificence of the temples, the pompous ceremonial of the sacrifices, the rich beauty of the images, all combined to give a certain respectability and dignity to those profane extravagancies. Every little corner of the Empire must have

its own special deities; and, in default of human beings to be raised on such a pedestal, the brute creation must receive the incense of a senseless and degraded worship; while superb edifices were actually consecrated to the vilest of earthly passions, to pride, to impurity, to revenge. There were as many divinities as there were passions, almost as many gods as there were men; there was scarcely anything which man did not deify; the one true God alone remained unknown to him.

The world, almost from the very moment of its birth, was plunged into the deep horror of this darkness; each succeeding age added fresh impieties to enhance the gloom of this valley of the shadow of death, this prison in which the souls of men lay bound and fettered by their own act and will. As the time appointed by the Deliverer for His coming drew nearer and nearer, so did the depravity of men seem to grow and strengthen. Rome herself, the mistress of the world, even Rome had bowed down before the strange gods of the very nations which she had subjugated; within her walls were to be seen the idols of conquered nations, serving rather as public monuments of her folly and blindness than as trophies of her victories.

At length, however, in the fulness of time came the promised Deliverer; at length, over the darkness of this hideous night, rose the Sun of Justice, never to set, flooding the world with Light unquenchable. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, the Divine Son of an Immaculate Mother.

Well, and what is this inestimable benefit, this glorious event, this Divine Birth, to us? How does it affect us, what change has it wrought in us, who live not in the darkness of a pagan world? It is true that we no

longer adore vain idols, a Jupiter, a Venus, a Mars, impersonations of the vilest passions; but is the Eternal God therefore more glorified among us? Do we not put in their place and raise upon their pedestals wealth, voluptuousness, human respect, the world with all its pleasures? For, remember, whatever we love more than God, that we worship; all that we prefer to God becomes in very truth our God; all that constitutes the one sole object of our thoughts, desires, affections, hopes and fears, constitutes at the same time our worship; our gods are our passions to which we sacrifice the one true and only God.

In the time of the darkness of Paganism, men also desired to rob God of the glory of His providence and of His eternal wisdom. Philosophers, recognizing the extravagant folly of a worship which multiplied its deities *ad infinitum*, and compelled even by the light of reason to acknowledge the existence of one only Supreme Being, disfigured the representations of that Being's nature by a thousand wild conceptions. Some pictured to themselves a slothful god, shut up as it were in himself, enjoying his own happiness, not deigning to look down upon what might be passing on earth, indifferent to the existence and the concerns of the beings whom he had created, as little moved by their virtues as by their vices, leaving to chance the changes of times and seasons, the revolutions of empires, the destiny of private individuals, the whole machine of this vast universe, and the ordering of all human affairs. Others supposed him to be in subjection to a certain arbitrary chain of events; they constructed for themselves a god without liberty and without power, and while they regarded him as the master of men, they yet believed him to be the slave of destiny. The errors

of reason were then the sole rule of religion and of the creed of those who posed and were indeed regarded as the most enlightened of mankind. Jesus Christ came to render to His Eternal Father that glory of which the vain reasonings of philosophy had robbed Him. He came to teach men that Faith is the source of all true light, and that the submission of reason is the first step taken by Christian philosophy. He came to give certainty to all its uncertainties by teaching us what we ought to know of the Supreme Being and what we must rest content not to know of Him.

Many of the Christians of to-day have almost as erroneous and as human an idea of the Divinity as had the pagan philosophers of those days; making no account of Him in the events of daily life, living as though chance or the caprice of men decided all things here below, and regarding happiness and misfortune as the two only divinities that govern and preside in the world.

Universal peace was reigning over the whole universe, when Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isa. ix. 6), appeared on earth. All nations subject to the Roman Empire were uncomplainingly bowing beneath the yoke of those haughty masters of the world. After the civil dissensions which had depopulated her dwellings, scattered her proscribed subjects into far-away islands and deserts, and bathed Europe and Asia in the blood of her citizens, Rome herself was recovering breath; and, reunited under the authority of a Cæsar, she was finding in servitude such peace as she had never been able to enjoy in the days of her liberty.

The world then was at peace; but it was only a spurious peace. Man, a prey to his own violent and

degraded passions, felt always within him the raging storm, the cruel conflict of those passions. Far away from God, delivered over to the agitations and rebellion of his own heart, thwarted and tormented by the multiplicity and contrariety of his own lawless desires, he could find no peace, because he sought it only in the very source of all his trouble and disquietude. The philosophers had boasted of being able to give it to their disciples, but that absolute control and calming of the passions which they promised to their disciples, and which they so emphatically proclaimed to be at their disposal, had indeed power to repress the outburst of such passions, but left all the venom and tumult in full possession of the citadel, the heart of man. It was a peace made up of pride and ostentation, an external mask, beneath which the real man always found his true self.

To-day, on this Feast of the Nativity, Jesus Christ comes down to earth, bringing to men that true peace which the world had hitherto been unable to give. He comes, bringing the remedy which was to touch, nay, with which He actually touches, the very source of the disease. His Divine philosophy does not confine itself to giving those pompous precepts which might please reason but which never laid a healing finger on the wounds of the heart ; and as pride, sensuality, hatred and revenge had been the fatal well-springs of all the agitations which convulsed that heart, He comes to give peace to it, drying up those poisoned springs by His grace, His doctrine, His Divine example.

Yes, I say that pride was the original source of all the troubles which had distracted the hearts of men. Consider the wars, the dissensions, which that fatal passion has kindled upon earth, the torrents of blood with

which it has deluged the universe ! What is the history of peoples and of empires, of princes and of conquerors, of all ages and of all nations ; what but the history of the calamities with which pride from the very beginning of time has afflicted men ? The whole world was but one vast, gloomy stage, on which day by day this imperious and insensate passion paraded scenes of bloodshed and horror. These external, these visible miseries were, however, but a faint image of the distractions with which pride racked the souls of men. Ambition was counted as a virtue, moderation as a mean sort of cowardice ; a single individual who succeeded in upsetting all the laws and customs of his country and in wrecking the happiness of millions that he might usurp the foremost rank among his fellow-citizens, was applauded for his crime, and his name, blood-stained though it was, not only found a prominent place in the annals of his own generation, but was handed down to posterity as that of a hero and a patriot. Descending into the lower ranks of humanity, this passion though making less noise and display was none the less keen and violent. The man living in obscurity, was no more at peace than he who lived before the public ; every one was struggling to get the upper hand among his fellows. The orator, the philosopher, disputed with one another for that fame which was the sole aim and object of their labours ; men, having surrendered themselves to the indulgence of pride, and not being able ever to satisfy its insatiable desires, could never be calm, never at peace, Pride, having become the sole source of human honour and glory, had also become the fatal rock on which man's peace and happiness were wrecked.

The Birth of Jesus Christ, by correcting the world

of this error, established in it that peace which pride had banished from earth. He might have manifested Himself to men with all those dazzling marks of sovereignty which the prophets had attributed to Him ; He might have assumed the pompous titles of Conqueror of Judah, Lawgiver of the people, Deliverer of Israel. Had He done this, Jerusalem would, in these glorious characteristics, have recognized Him Whom she was expecting and desiring ; but Jerusalem saw in those titles only human glory, and Jesus Christ comes to undeceive her, to teach her the absolute nothingness of all such glory, to open her eyes to the fact that such an expectation was unworthy of the oracles in which so many prophets had foretold His coming ; that the Holy Ghost Who had inspired their prophecies could not promise anything but holiness and eternal benefits to men ; that all other so-called benefits, far from making men happy, would only multiply their miseries and their crimes ; and that His visible ministry did not correspond to the dazzling promises which had announced Him through so many ages, only because that ministry would be wholly spiritual and would have no other object in view than the salvation of all men.

Thus Jesus Christ is born at Bethlehem in poverty and lowliness, He Whose Birth was heralded by all the Host of Heaven in joyous canticles ; without any title to give Him distinction in the eyes of men, He Who was exalted far above all principalities and powers ; He suffers His name to be inscribed in the list of the most obscure of Cæsar's subjects, He Whose name is above every other name, and Who alone was entitled to write the names of His elect in the book of life. Rude and simple shepherds alone come to do homage to Him before Whom all that is greatest in Heaven, on

earth, and under the earth, must bend the knee. In fact, all that can confound and put to nought human pride, is brought together in the spectacle of His Nativity. If titles, rank and prosperity could make us happy here below and bring peace into our hearts, Jesus Christ would have appeared invested with them and would have brought such benefits to His disciples ; but He only brings peace to us by despising them, and by teaching us to despise them ourselves ; He comes to make us happy only by coming to repress those desires which had hitherto been the source of all men's disquietude ; He comes to offer us blessings more real and more durable, and which alone are capable of calming our hearts, of fulfilling our desires, of relieving our distresses.

Yet who really enjoys this blessed peace ? Are wars, tumults, dissensions, more rare throughout the universe since His Nativity ? Are the Empires and States which adore Him more peaceful in consequence of His coming ? Does the pride which He came to annihilate stir up among men less strife and confusion ? Seek out among Christians this peace which was to be their heritage ; where will you find it ? In cities ? Pride is at work there putting all in commotion, each man striving to climb higher in the social scale than his forefathers. In the shelter of home and domestic retirement ? Why, that is only a centre of secret cares and anxieties ; the father of the family always painfully occupied and more eager about pushing his children's worldly fortunes than in securing for them a Christian education. In the palace of kings ? But that is the very place in which boundless ambition gnaws and devours all hearts ! That is the very place in which, under a specious show of tranquil gaiety, the

bitterest and most violent passions are fostered, and discontent and misery created. O Peace of Jesus Christ, surpassing all imagination, sole remedy for all the ills with which pride incessantly agitates our hearts, who then can give you to men ?

But, in the second place, if the disquietudes of pride had banished peace from the face of the earth, sensuality had been no less active in so doing. Men, forgetful of the excellence of their nature and of the sanctity of their origin, gave themselves up without scruple or restraint to the indulgence of their animal passions. Finding these degraded instincts to be the strongest and the most universal of these ruling passions which seek to dominate the human heart, men believed them to be also the most pardonable and the most legitimate. In order to give them a higher sanction, they were admitted even into the temples and turned into deities ; and the infamous vice of impurity became the only homage paid at the altars. A philosopher even, considered to be the wisest of his age, wished to abolish marriage, fearing that it might act as a restraint upon the unbridled passions of his disciples. As this miserable vice spread more and more over the universe, so did it more and more cease to be reckoned as a vice. Yet what a deluge of ills it had brought upon the world ! Wars and dissensions, the destruction of empires as well as of family peace. By its terrible agency sceptres and crowns had been overthrown, brother has been armed against brother, nay, it would be impossible to catalogue all the miseries which through succeeding ages had been its outcome. It promised, indeed, peace and pleasure to those who surrendered themselves to its tyranny ; but always in its steps followed a phantom troop, black and hideous,

of jealousies, suspicions, violence, excesses, disgust, inconstancy, growing anxieties ; till, at length, a very small company of the sages, only longing for repose and a respite from these intolerable miseries, withdrew from the practice of this vice, even in those ages of darkness.

But this motive, a desire for peace, was wholly insufficient to stem the tide of human corruption, or to quench the flames of sinful passion in the hearts of men. A remedy more powerful was needed, and it is the Birth of the Deliverer, Who comes to draw men out of this slough of corruption, to make them pure and stainless, to unwind the shameful bonds in which they were entangled, and to give them peace by restoring to them that liberty and innocence of which the tyranny of that loathsome vice had robbed them. He is born of a Virgin Mother who was the purest of creatures ; and thereby He at once exalts a virtue hitherto unknown to the world and despised even by His own people. Moreover, by uniting Himself to us, He becomes our Head, incorporates us with Himself, making us the members of His mystical body, of that body which owes its very life and inspiration to Him alone, of that body whose every ministry is holy, of that body which is to be seated at the right hand of God and to glorify Him through all eternity. Behold the height of honour to which Jesus Christ, in this mystery, exalts our flesh !

Finally, the Birth of Jesus Christ reconciles men with His Eternal Father, it reunites Jews and Gentiles ; it puts an absolute end to all those odious distinctions of Greek and Barbarian, Roman and Scythian ; it extinguishes all enmity and hatred ; of all peoples it makes but one people, of all His disciples but one heart

and one soul. Hitherto men had been bound to one another neither by religion, nor by a common hope, nor by that new sort of alliance which makes us find in an enemy a brother. They looked upon one another almost as creatures of a different order and species ; the diversity of religion, manners, country, language, interests, had, it would seem, as if diversified in them the same nature ; scarcely did they recognize in each other that outward form of humanity which was the only sign of connection left to them. They ravaged the earth like wild beasts, their glory seemed to consist in depopulating it ; there was no bond of union among them except their very passions and interests, which were themselves the one only source of their diversions and of their discord.

But Jesus Christ became our peace, our reconciliation, the corner-stone which unites together the whole edifice, the life-giving Head, uniting all His members and making of them one and the same body. All things bind us to Him, and all that binds us to Him unites us with one another. The same spirit animates us ; the same hope sustains us ; the same mother gives birth to us ; the same fold shelters us ; the same Shepherd guides us ; we are children of the same Father, heirs of the same promises, citizens of the same Eternal City, members of one and the same body.

Well, and have so many sacred bonds succeeded in uniting us with one another ? Christianity which ought to be but another name for unity of heart and soul among the faithful, the bond which unites them to one another and Jesus Christ to them ; Christianity which ought to be a reflection upon earth of the image of Heaven's own peace ; Christianity, I say, is, alas ! no longer anything but a stage on which dissensions

and divisions play their dreary part. Fierce passions, strife and discord, seem to have taken up a permanent abode in the hearts of Christians; religion, which ought to unite them, actually serves to separate them. The infidel, the enemy of Jesus Christ, the disciples of the false prophet who came only to bring fire and sword among men, are at peace, while the children of peace, the disciples of Him Who comes to-day to bring peace upon earth, are at enmity with one another![1] Kings rise up against kings, and nations against nations; the seas which divided them, only bring them together that they may destroy one another. The earth itself is not wide enough to contain them; nor can the limits which nature seems to have assigned to each State and Empire, restrain their measureless greed and lust of possession. O Divine Reconciler of men, return once more to earth, since the peace which Thou didst bring there at Thy Birth still leaves so many wars and calamities to desolate the world!

[1] "During the 17th century," says the French Socialist newspaper *L'Humanité*, "Europe was agitated by continual wars. Louis XIV amazed his contemporaries by his repeated victories; and many of the writers of that period sang the praises of his all-conquering armies. There were, however, some moralists who, taking a different tone, did not by any means consider that the thirst for war and conquest ranked among those passions upon which men have a right to pride themselves. Pascal, in his sublime solitude, nourished dreams of pacific arbitration; he says, 'When it is a question of deciding whether we ought to make war and kill so many men, a single individual, and he an interested one, has to settle the matter; there ought to be a third, and he disinterested.' La Rochefoucauld wrote some few lines, La Bruyère some pages, of cruel irony on the subject of warriors. But among the men of that period there are two whose teaching ought undoubtedly to arrest our attention, and acquaintance with whose thoughts ought to stir our keenest interest. Both of them were great dignitaries of the Church, both were entrusted with the education of princes, and both wrote books for the instruction of their pupils. It is in these books, which were written that they might be read by the son and the grandson of Louis XIV, that we shall look for the thoughts of Bossuet and Fénelon on the ethics of war."

XIX

THE BLESSING OF THE COLOURS OF A REGIMENT

By Massillon

"They have set up their ensigns for signs" (Ps. lxxiii. 4).

To-day, met together as we are in the sanctuary of peace, it is with no idea of kindling the fire of your warlike passions, or even of stimulating you to engage in new conquests by reminding you of past victories, that I take the opportunity of this solemn and imposing ceremony to speak to you. I am, as you well know, bound by my sacred office to act as the mouthpiece of a faith which has for its object, not death and strife, but life and reconciliation; which breaks down the wall of separation between Greek and Barbarian; which, in the language of the Prophet, makes the wolf and the lamb feed together, which gathers under one Head all nations and tribes and tongues; which calms the passions of princes and peoples, blends their interests, puts an end to their jealousies, limits their ambition, inspires with the same desires those who have, or ought to have, the same hope; and if it sometimes calls to war and conflict, yet makes the heart the seat of those battles and makes those conflicts end in triumphs of grace.

Yes, I remember all that, and more. I know that I

am speaking before the very Altar of that Immaculate Lamb Who came to bring peace between Heaven and earth; and therefore it is that, putting aside the question of the antiquity and beauty of this ceremony, without dwelling upon its externals which are indeed in themselves striking enough, I want to show you something of its spiritual significance, of its utility and the lessons which it is intended to convey; and far from exalting the glory of the profession of arms, I shall speak to you of its perils, and yet at the same time of the means whereby you may in the exercise of it acquire another glory, undying, indestructible.

And now, with that end in view, I would ask you why it is that in all times, even among the rudest and most barbarous nations, this same profession of arms has always been marked by some sort of religious character. Why were the Romans so careful to head their legions with their Eagles and the representations of their gods, while other nations never failed to trace upon their banners the figures and symbols of whatever their own peculiar superstition regarded as most sacred? Why was this, if not to prevent the tumult and agitation of war from making them forget what they owed to the deities who presided over it? Why were the Israelites, whether journeying or fighting, always preceded by the Brazen Serpent? Why did Constantine, after he had become the captive of the Cross, raise that blessed emblem of Christianity in the sight of all nations as the standard of his conquering hosts? Why did our kings, whenever they took up arms against the Infidel, hasten to the steps of the Altar to receive from a consecrated hand a consecrated banner? Why even in our own day does the Church with prayers of peace and charity bless these melancholy tokens of war and

dissension? Why, if not to remind the soldier that war even is in a manner a sort of religious worship; that it is the God of armies Who presides over victories and battles; that in His hands the conquerors very often are but instruments of His wrath, employed by Him to chastise the sins of the nations[1]; that there is no true valour other than that which takes its source in religion and in piety; and that, after all, wars and revolutions are but as play-acting in the eyes of God, a mere shifting of the scenes on the stage of the universe; that He alone changes not, and that in Him alone is that which can calm, satisfy, and fix eternally the restless agitations, the insatiable desires, of the human heart?

It is true indeed that piety, so difficult even in the cloister where everything tends to inspire it, so rare in the world where the common duties of religion sustain it, finds in the licence and dissipation of the profession of arms so many obstacles, such stumbling-blocks, such pitfalls and quicksands, that day by day we see the wreck and ruin of those on whom our highest hopes had been fixed, so carefully had they been nurtured and trained, so promising had been their natural disposition, so lavish the grace bestowed upon them.

Yet how strange that it should be so! You to whom I am speaking, and who are living in the midst of all the perils of war, may every day say most truly, with David: *There is but one step between me and death* (1 Kings xx. 3). You can really only reckon upon your life as you would upon a treasure which you knew to

[1] In one of his pastoral letters ordering a *Te Deum* for the victory of the French troops, Bishop Massillon writes: "The Church has ever regarded the wars that arise among Christian rulers as the chastisements of God upon kingdoms and their inhabitants; and if she orders joyful canticles of thanksgiving for the victories of the conqueror, it is only in the hope that victory will lead to a prompt and lasting peace."

be exposed to view, and consequently to the danger of being stolen, on a road beset with robbers ; you stand every moment on the brink of eternity, and keep your hold upon this world and its pleasures only by dint of clinging to a cord scarcely thicker than a hair. How then can you dare to give yourselves up to the dominion of sinful habits and unworthy passions ? With what sort of vain hopes can you possibly flatter yourselves ? Are you relying on the prospect of a few moments granted to religion on the eve of battle ? on the prayers and blessing of a priest then ? But of you who are in good faith I would ask, what is actually the condition of your soul ? Have you ever, in such circumstances, gone back in thought, with compunction of heart, to the years of your past life ? Have you ever offered to God the sacrifice of a humble and contrite spirit, imploring His mercy and forgiveness ? [1] Is it not too true that your mental horizon is bounded by the all-absorbing consideration of glory, duty, danger ? The very thought of the examination of conscience is rejected as dangerous to the courage of a soldier ; you plunge more recklessly than ever into pleasures and excesses ; and, alas ! again and again a poor soul passes from sin and debauchery to death. O God ! how awful a fate, and yet how common among such as those to whom I am speaking ! In the dreadful conflict of battle, you have again and again seen one of your companions in sin fall at your side, never to lift his

[1] Cf. Shakespeare, *King Henry V :* "Every subject's duty is the king's; but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience; and dying so, death is to him advantage; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gained: and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that, making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness, and to teach others how they should prepare."

head again ; you have heard the familiar voice gasp out a word of blasphemy, followed an instant later by the last, shuddering, dying groan ; perhaps even you had been planning together some sinful scheme, which only this sudden stroke of fate makes it impossible for you to carry out.

Think, then, I implore you, what would have been your destiny had you not escaped with your life from that battle, as by a miracle ? If death had torn your soul from the body and dragged it before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, think, I say, what sort of a soul would that have been ? A monstrous thing, foul with the leprosy of sin ; a hideous thing, stained with the crimes of blasphemy and cruelty ; yet brought face to face with the All-Holy, All-Pure Redeemer and Judge, and cowering and shrinking from the dazzling brightness of the great white throne and from the awful gulf of eternal misery yawning at your feet. Yet remember what this avenging God, this Judge so severe and so tremendous in His wrath, has done for you. His all-powerful hand delivered you, He covered you with His shield in the day of battle, His angel turned aside the weapons which in the moment of fixing the term of your natural life would have fixed also irrevocably your eternity of punishment. Well, what use have you made of a life thus spared ? what homage have you paid God with a body for which you owe Him a double debt ? Have you made it the servant of iniquity, and converted a member of Jesus Christ into an instrument of sin and shame ? Ah ! you have indeed managed to turn the dangers and risks of war to profit as regards your worldly affairs ; but have you done the same with respect to your eternal salvation ? You have, it is true, won your prince's favour, and got

promotion in his service; but have you earned the approval of Almighty God, or risen in the ranks of the army of our Great Captain, Jesus Christ? Tremble, as your heart answers that question, lest a sudden stroke dealt by God's unseen hand should put an end for ever to your sins and a beginning to the unending cycle of His dread vengeance.

The military profession, brilliant as it is in the eyes of the world, is yet assuredly perilous as regards your salvation. But let us see how its dangers may be avoided.

I know that ambition is a vice almost inseparable from a soldier's character. I call this passion a vice, as does the Gospel; but custom and the world's standard of right and wrong raise it to the dignity of a virtue. Indeed, from a military point of view, the man who is not keen about winning honours and attaining posts of distinction, would be supposed incapable of the daring courage which is the moving-spring of great and splendid actions. Yet, even supposing that your ambition does not exceed the bounds of moderation, if you tread no crooked paths to reach your goal, if no selfish greed or disregard of a neighbour's good should mar your ambitions; even under these most favourable circumstances, what, I ask you, have these mere worldly aspirations to compare with the glorious hopes and promises of our Christian faith? Honours, distinctions, influential posts, a name in the world's history? Yet, to attain all these, through what have you not to go? What disappointments, what neglect on the part of those in high places, what ingratitude, what want of recognition of past services! You see younger men put above you; we hear your bitter complaints, we see your discontent; it seems to eat into your very hearts! Ah! but you are forgetting,

or you are too blind to see, that all this is the design of Providence, and is intended to make you weigh all those mere trifles, those earthly prizes and honours, in the balance of Christian Justice, to value them as little as they deserve to be valued, and to turn our thoughts to the generous, unceasing care of the King of kings, Who takes account of all the smallest services done for His sake to an earthly sovereign and will reward them when that sovereign forgets or even fails to recognize them.

And, after all, what are men and women but actors on the world's stage ? Nothing is real, nothing is enduring ; a splendid show and then the scene shifts. A sudden revolution, a terrible war ; and thousands, nay, millions, are swallowed up in the gulf of eternity. Empires, generations, ages, vanish, leaving no trace behind. Those who went before us have made way for us on the road of life, and we in our turn shall make room for those who are to come after us. Thus the ages renew themselves, thus the face of the world changes incessantly, thus the living and the dead succeed and replace one another continually. Nothing abides, everything wears away, fades, is extinguished. God alone is always the same, and His years have no end. Before His eyes the river of time flows on, bearing on its troubled waters generation after generation ; and, alas ! He sees His weak and sinful creatures, as they are swept past Him by its tempestuous current, still resisting and dishonouring Him in that short space of time allotted to them, till they are carried out into the gulf of eternity, there to fall into the hands of the living God and to learn that His justice is great as His mercy which they had refused to accept.

But now, turning to another aspect of military life,

you ask me how it is possible to reconcile the valour so essential to your profession of arms with Christian gentleness and humility. Well, let us understand what you mean by valour. How would you define it? Is it pride of temperament, a fiery passionate excitement in the blood, a greedy thirst for so-called glory, a littleness of mind which treats danger with levity only that it may get the more admiration if it escapes unharmed from it? Nay, we know better than to call that valour. The great generals whose names are dear to all of us, and who live in history, have taught us a lesson and put a higher standard before us. Wisdom, prudence, circumspection, mature judgment, calmness, and nobility of soul, all go to make up a soldier's true valour; and without these characteristics it becomes a vice rather than a virtue.

Our ideas, our estimates of things, are so false, so mistaken. For instance, what (you say) can we expect in the matter of piety among our soldiers? You seem to think that men whose glory it is to serve the kings of earth, would be considered very poor creatures if they were faithful and devout towards the King of kings, their Divine Lord and Master. What a monstrous thought! But happily the testimony of ages comes in and laughs it to scorn. Why, even in the time of paganism, the Emperors of Rome found that among their soldiers none were so intrepid in danger and so brave in combat as the Christians! And these were men who, living amid the licence of a heathen camp, had their appointed hours for prayer, sometimes spent whole nights in devotion, and, if at the close of an action they were condemned to the scaffold, were found ready to shed their blood on it, without a murmur, for the defence of their faith.

It is true that we ought not to expect from you that tender devotional piety, at once fervent and timid in its reverence, recollected and absorbed in the things of God, which we find in people who, living retired from the world, are free from its cares and distractions. But at the same time let me remind you that there are some things which we may and do expect, from the practice and cultivation of which no human power can dispense you, and of which you should be proud, not ashamed, to be accused. Shall I enumerate these things? They are uprightness of heart, a profound reverence for God, a solid foundation of faith and religion, exactness in the discharge of all the essential duties of Christianity, probity, honesty of purpose, and a sovereign contempt and disgust for all that savours of licence and excess. This is what reason permits us to expect of a Christian soldier.

Far from weakening it, religion strengthens the soul. Death has less terror for us when our minds are at ease as to its consequences.[1] A conscience which nothing alarms sees danger with composure, and faces it bravely, once duty calls thereto. There is nothing to approach

[1] "How glorious are they that return victors from the battle-field! How blessed are they that die as martyrs in the conflict! Rejoice, brave athlete, if you live and conquer in the Lord: but exult and glory still more if you die in battle and be united to the Lord. If they are blessed who die in the Lord, are not they much more blessed who die for the Lord? Precious in the sight of God is the death of His saints, whether they die in bed or in battle; but death in battle is more precious, as it is the more glorious. O secure is the life when the conscience is pure; secure is the life when death is awaited without fear and accepted with joy and devotion."—St. Bernard.

St. Bernard's mighty, if somewhat bloodthirsty, Exhortation to the Knights Templars probably supplied the groundwork for some of this sermon of Massillon's. An excellent English version of the Discourse to the Templars is to be found in *Selections from the Writings of St. Bernard*, by the Rev. H. Grimley, M.A. (Cambridge University Press, 1910).

the holy pride of a heart that fights under the eyes of God, and which respects and honours His power in that of the king. There is little need to remind you of Moses, Josue, David, Ezechias, and many another in succeeding ages, who were at once great warriors and great saints, the heroes of the world and of religion. Christian ages too had their Constantine and their Theodosius, terrible at the head of their armies, but humble and pious at the foot of the Altar. But I have said enough, or at least enough to show you what God expects of every true soldier who at the same time deserves the title of a true Christian.

Deign, O God of armies, to give the spirit of faith and of piety to these warriors armed for battle. Give Your blessing to their sacred standards; leave on them the traces of sanctity, which, in the midst of combat, will aid the faith of the dying and kindle the ardour of those who fight; cover with Your protection this illustrious Regiment which offers its banners to You in this church; and let the valour of these troops be felt by the nations jealous of our glory.

But no, O Lord; rather give peace to the empires and the kingdoms; be touched by the pitiable spectacle that war offers to Your eyes. Let the peril and the loss of so many souls disarm Your vengeance and call down Your clemency. Listen to the cries of the just ones who, moved by the calamities of Israel, say to You every day, with the Prophet: *O Lord, we have sought after peace, and it is not yet come to us.*

It is sin, Christians, that has brought on us the anger of Heaven; war is a sure sign of God's wrath kindled by the sins of the nations. Let us appease His anger by improving our conduct; let us re-establish the peace of Jesus Christ in our hearts; let us calm

our passions and our domestic enemies: and we shall soon see Europe tranquil, our foreign enemies pacified, peace established everywhere, and an eternal repose succeed this peace of earth.[1]

[1] "Christ came, above all, 'to break down the middle wall of partition' that divided nation from nation, that alienated tribe from tribe, and people from people, and to make them all one family, acknowledging the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Jesus Christ. Let us cherish the hope that the day is not far off when the reign of the Prince of Peace shall be firmly established on the earth, and the Spirit of the Gospel will so far sway the minds and hearts of rulers and cabinets that international disputes will be decided, not by standing armies, but by permanent courts of arbitration—when they will be settled not on the battlefield, but in the halls of conciliation, and will be adjusted, not by the sword, but by the pen, which is mightier than the sword."—CARDINAL GIBBONS, *Sermons* (1908).

"I love my family more than myself, my country more than my family, and the whole world more than my country."—FÉNELON.

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